



# WAY OF CHOICES

BOOK 06

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# Way of Choices

(Ze Tian ji)

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# Synopsis

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To pick is to choose. This is a story about choices. Three thousand worlds full of gods and demons, with a daoist scroll in your hand, you are able to control the entire universe...

At the beginning of time, a mystical meteor came crashing down from outer space and scattered all over the world. A piece of it landed in the Eastern Continent. There were mysterious totems carved upon the meteor. Through viewing these totems, mankind comprehended the Dao and established the Orthodoxy.

Several thousand years later, the fourteen years old orphan Chen Changsheng left his master to cure his illness and change his fate. He brought a part of a marriage vow with him to the capital, thus beginning the journey of a rising hero...

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# Chapter 501 - The Past, Soaked And Rotted

## By The Passage Of Time

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He realized that compared to yesterday, today's wind seemed to carry different scents. It was moister and also carried the smells of mud and fish, and that wasn't a bad thing. [How can the canals be so clear? Because water comes flowing from the source.](#) The canals around the Divine Path of the Mausoleum of Books were so spotlessly clear due to this principle. With the reopening of the Garden of Zhou, it should have begun to develop in a positive direction.

("How can the canals be so clear? Because water comes flowing from the source" is a line from a poem/song called 观书有感二首, which roughly translates to "Two Songs on Feelings from Reading Books", authored Zhu Xi, a famous scholar of the Song Dynasty.)

The group of monsters had gotten somewhat closer to the mausoleum. They still seemed like a dense mass, but from a distance, he could still perceive that there had been some sort of change.

Reaching the plain and gazing at the tens of thousands of monsters kneeling before him, Chen Changsheng was rather astonished. Yesterday, he had only brought a few medicines with him, so he had not imagined that the Mountain-toppling Fiend and the Monster Bull's injuries would recover so much. As for the other monsters, they also seemed much more vigorous.

Today, the Earth Monkey did not hide itself in the horn of the Mountain-toppling Fiend. Instead, it was hiding in the middle of the crowd of monsters, watching him from the distance. Its eyes

seemed to roll around in their sockets. He didn't know what it was thinking, but it seemed to hold no murderous intent.

Chen Changsheng took some medicinal herbs and placed them on the ground before him.

Seeing this sight, the Monster Bull slowly nodded its head in gratitude, then raised its tail straight up like a flagpole.

The Mountain-toppling Fiend stood up and let out a harsh howl towards the vast plains. The group of monsters began to surge like the tide and then organize itself into groups, seeming very orderly and obedient. Even those monsters that were old enemies with each other and would usually fight each other to the death when meeting dared not move, even when they were squeezed right next to each other.

Chen Changsheng found this all rather unexpected. He blankly stared for a while before continuing his actions. It didn't take much time for a small mountain of medicinal herbs to be piled in front of him.

Staring at the small mountain of herbs, even though the Monster Bull and Mountain-toppling Fiend had once accompanied Zhou Dufu and seen much of the world, their eyes couldn't help but become a little lifeless. The Earth Monkey found it even more unbearable. It roughly pushed itself away from the dragon serpent and its forelegs incessantly pushed against the ground. Like a bolt of lightning, it plunged to the very front of the group of monsters, then fell at Chen Changsheng's feet with a plop.



It fell with exquisite care. Its forelegs were raised up high while its crippled lower half gently slapped against the ground. It raised up a small cloud of dust and seemed particularly respectful and lovable.

Last time, it had also kissed the ground at Chen Changsheng's feat, but that had been an act, a far cry from its current heartfelt sincerity.

This was because it had confirmed that Chen Changsheng really was willing to help these monsters. Even more importantly, he actually possessed the ability to help these monsters.

"All of you...split it up amongst yourselves, still according to yesterday's rules."

Chen Changsheng didn't know how to communicate with these monsters. After thinking it over, he said these words then headed towards the outskirts of the plain.

Behind him, the group of monsters that was like a tide bowed their heads to send him off.

He had already made a careful search of the Garden of Zhou yesterday. He did not repeat this today, instead going straight to the lake and mountains on the other side of the cold pool.

In the depths of the lake, he found the Night Pearl Luoluo had

gifted him as well as the three thousand scriptures of the Daoist Canon that he had brought from Xining Village to the capital. Finally, he took out from the mud the box of silver ingots and treasure. As for the food he had brought for the Black Dragon to snack on, it had long since been completely eaten by the fish or other beings of the lake.

He brought these things to the shore and then took a glance at the sky. He began to place those books soaked by the lake water on the rocks to dry. He knew that this was a very bothersome task, requiring a great deal of time and patience, so he was in no rush. It was very difficult to open these soaked books, putting aside the sheer number of books. He continuously made his way along the shore, his movements seeming just like he was performing some grand ceremony.

A stretch of the rocky shore about a li long was covered in books. Under the sun, the water in the books began to gradually evaporate.

Chen Changsheng took this moment of rest to take out the treasure and silver from the box and wipe them clean with a handkerchief.

Suddenly, he saw a small object.

It was a bamboo dragonfly. It was already very old, and now because it had spent so long in the water, it had lost color. There were even a few places that were on the verge of rotting away.



Many years ago, when he still lived in Xining Village, he exchanged letters with a certain person. This bamboo dragonfly served as evidence of that, and it was also a part of his childhood memories.

Chen Changsheng gazed in silence at the bamboo dragonfly. Those books had not rotted away, but it was unable to endure. As expected, compared to materials, the span of time was even more important.

Nothing was able to endure the test of time.

That engagement had been ended. He and she from here on would have no more connection.

Upon realizing this, his mind became more relaxed, as if he had been relieved of a great burden.

But for some reason, he also felt like he had lost something, like there was an empty space in his heart.

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The summer gradually retreated and autumn began to pervade the air. Winter was also no longer that far off.

The area in front of the gate of the Orthodox Academy became much more quiet. Very few matches took place there now, and the common people of the capital gradually lost interest. The awning across the street was finally taken down at the Star Autumn Festival. As for why it was taken down, it might have been because the weather had gotten colder and the sun less scorching, or perhaps some other reason.

On the other hand, the Orthodox Academy became much more active. Every day in the morning, one could hear the clear sounds of books being read. Only at mealtime could one hear the sounds of students beating on their lunchboxes. Of course, there was even more laughter and cheers.

As for the Hundred Herb Garden separated from the Orthodox Academy by a wall, it went through the most intense changes. It was just that people rarely entered it, so these changes were not discovered. The countless fruit trees and herbal gardens within were all picked clean until one day, a eunuch from the palace was ordered to find an herb.

This was an extremely precious herb. It was said that it possessed miraculous effects with regards to regenerating flesh. If mixed with the proper herbs and refined into a pill, it could even regrow bones. The reason the palace was in a rush to find this herb was that a pimple had grown on the Princess of Ping's face. She was so angry that she couldn't even eat, especially when she heard that Xu Yourong was on the verge of returning to the capital.

The eunuch failed to find the herb. He looked at the Hundred Herb Garden that was clearly much more desolate and withered

away than before, his face pale to the extreme. He thought to himself, this year's autumn is really rather fierce, isn't it?

The medicinal herbs and spirit fruits of the Hundred Herb Garden had naturally been swept through by the autumn wind known as Chen Changsheng.

In these past few days, he lived out his life as calmly and studiously as he had lived the past sixteen years: reading, cultivating, practicing the sword, and then experiencing his sixteenth birthday.

A little different from the past few years was that on the third day after his birthday, he did not remember the person that was celebrating their birthday on that day.

He also very studiously researched the string of stone pearls, wanting to comprehend something from these Heavenly Tome Monoliths. However, for the moment, he had not discovered anything.

His cultivation was gradually growing more stable, growing ever closer to the peak of Ethereal Opening, but the problems with his body never improved. That shadow before him continued to quietly watch him.

With his research and guidance, a formal breakthrough was made with the problem of Luoluo's meridians. Cultivating in human techniques would no longer pose too much of a problem for her. Importantly, with the resolution of this problem, as long as

her blood was stimulated once more, then she would have a high chance of breaking through the demi-human imperial household's greatest obstruction. As a female, she would be able to learn the tyrannical techniques of the White Emperor.

For the demi-humans, it didn't even need to be asked to know how important it was. It was said that upon the news being relayed to the demi-humans, the tribes along the eight hundred li of the Red River rejoiced for three days and nights. Moreover, White Emperor City sent out a diplomatic mission to deliver to Chen Changsheng a huge set of gifts impossible for any normal person to obtain.

As he was able to resolve Luoluo's problem, he was naturally able to resolve Xuanyuan Po's problem. After his right arm was completely recovered, the bear youth began to cultivate the Heavenly Thunder Bringer and his strength advanced by leaps and bounds. His two iron fists were able to attract thunder and lightning, tyrannical beyond compare. Jin Yulu had come over to the Orthodox Academy just to take a look and was full of admiration. He decided on the spot that upon returning to White Emperor City, he would bestow a generous reward on the bear tribe.

Xuanyuan Po was so moved that tears poured from his eyes. He would no longer have to feel ashamed that he could eat blue lobster in the capital every day while his elders and fellow villagers back home could only live arduous lives of hunting in the mountains.

Chen Changsheng was also very happy for him, but he failed to recognize the other piece of information in Jin Yulu's words.

Zhexiu's injuries were also gradually recovering. Different from other patients who would lie in bed and rely on time to heal their wounds, although he seemed to lie unmoving on the bed, he was at every moment using his true essence to charge at his blocked and wounded meridians. This was a pain that only he could stand, and the only thing Chen Changsheng could do to assist was apply metal needles to somewhat alleviate the pain.

Just as Zhexiu had said before, pain was the force best able to stimulate vitality. One autumn's day, without assistance from anyone else, he was able to get out of bed. Using half the night, he was able to go downstairs and reach the lake shore, then let loose a cold and harsh howl towards the star-filled sky.

Everyone in the Orthodox Academy was roused from their sleep. Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six rushed to the lake. Seeing Zhexiu's lanky body, they were filled with some indescribable emotion and couldn't speak. Zhexiu had completely recovered, and he had even used the opportunity to open up the seventeen Qi channels that were unique to the bodies of the human-demi-human hybrids. As long as he was given sufficient time to stabilize, his strength would inevitably rise to a frightening level.

The entire capital heard this howl.

The principal alley of the Northern Military Department was silent as a grave. Zhou Tong, who seemed to have just begun recovering from a serious illness, glanced in the direction of the Orthodox Academy, his expression indifferent, as if he couldn't care less.

Zhou Tong had recently been very busy. He was busy with matters of the Imperial Court, communicating with people in the south and preparing to welcome a massive change with the new year. Yes, many people had already sensed that an undercurrent was surging forward such that the entire temple had become very quiet. However, this wasn't a bad thing. On the contrary, it brought a sort of hope.

The confluence of north and south really did seem on the verge of being put on the agenda.

No one understood why this was the case.

Su Li was still at Mount Li.

Mount Li was still in the south.

Why had so many people determined that regardless of whether Su Li was at Mount Li or not, he would not put a stop to this project?

The war with the demons was the greatest concern of the humans and demi-humans. No other matter was worthy of being discussed at the same level. The confluence of north and south was, without question, a most important component of this concern.

Whether it was the capital, the south, or White Emperor City,

they all had to make their corresponding preparations for this matter.

The capital and the south had to consider how power should be divided between the two sides. White Emperor City had to consider something somewhat simpler. That Saint couple only needed to ensure that their blood could continue to rule over the demi-human domain. The continued stability of the two shores of the Red River was the greatest contribution towards the alliance between the humans and demi-humans. As a result, when the demi-humans' diplomatic mission arrived at the capital, besides bringing Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy countless presents and rewards, they had one even more important mission: to bring Princess Luoluo home.



# Chapter 502 - Understanding Only After Separation

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The great banyan tree had already shed many of its leaves. Standing atop its branches and looking into the distance, whether one was gazing at the Li Palace or the Mausoleum of Books, they were all extremely clear, as if they were right before the eyes.

"I truly did not expect it." Chen Changsheng turned to Luoluo by his side and was quiet for a very long time, then repeated, "I did not expect it."

"Back then, my coming to the capital was truthfully Queen Mother's idea. She wanted to see if His Holiness the Pope or the Divine Empress would be able to help resolve the problems with my meridians. If not, I would be unable to cultivate in the techniques of the White Emperor clan, and thus be unable to inherit the throne. I might even have had to marry some person I didn't want to marry. But Queen Mother definitely could not have imagined that the Pope and the Divine Empress were unable to resolve my problems, but instead it was Teacher."

Luoluo raised her head and gazed at Chen Changsheng's face in admiration. "Teacher, you truly are extraordinary."

"It's only because I enjoyed considering the problems of meridians ever since I was a child..."

Chen Changsheng recalled that he had already explained this last year, so fell silent.

He really hadn't expected that Luoluo would leave, even though her departure was a matter of course—she had come to the capital to learn or have her illness checked. Now, she knew how to cultivate in human techniques and could see the possibility of succeeding to the hegemony of the White Emperor, and her illness had been cured. So it was only natural that she should return to White Emperor City. She was the Princess of the Red River and millions upon millions of her subjects were awaiting her care.

But all this had happened far too quickly. There had been no sign, and whenever he met her in the Imperial Palace or Li Palace, she had never mentioned it.

Fine, these were all excuses. So what if it was sudden? He still would be unwilling to part, because he truly was unwilling.

In the rich twilight, both the lake and trees of the Orthodox Academy seemed to be afire. Luoluo began to make her way out of the Orthodox Academy, then suddenly stopped. She turned around and snuggled lightly into his chest.

Chen Changsheng knew what she was feeling, because he was feeling the same, and used his hands to rub her head. In these almost two years, he and she would often sit side by side, or hold hands, or she would bury her head in his chest. He was used to it and so didn't think much of it. Moreover, in his eyes, she was a little girl, like a younger sister or a daughter...

"Teacher, there's something I've always been deceiving you

about."

Luoluo raised her head to look at him, her eyelashes blinking. "In truth, I'm not twelve years old. I'm the same age as Teacher."

Chen Changsheng was stupefied, at a complete loss for words. As for his hands, he was even more at a loss as to where to put them, feeling that putting them anywhere was wrong.

"You...how can you deceive others?"

"Teacher, you're stupid to not be able to see, but you still want to blame me lah..." Luoluo opened her eyes wide and seriously stared at him.

Chen Changsheng had no words to reply.

Laughter akin to silver bells rang throughout the Orthodox Academy.

Lahlahlahlah.

Luoluo left, returning to White Emperor City to confront the challenges she had to face.

Yet her laughter continued to echo around the great banyan tree and lake of the Orthodox Academy for many years.

Even after many years, whenever the students of the Orthodox Academy mentioned the legendary demi-human princess, the vice principal that they had never seen before, they would give endless rueful sighs. At the same time, Tang Thirty-Six would be filled with countless complaints. Back then when he had been recruiting new students, how had he said it?

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Luoluo left, but the people coming and going from the Orthodox Academy actually increased in number.

The priests of the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education would come to give lessons, Priest Xin would come over when he wasn't busy, and Mao Qiuyu would occasionally visit the tea house outside the Orthodox Academy to sit for a while.

The person who visited the Orthodox Academy the most was Prince Chen Liu. Time could change many things, including one's opinion of others, because time was the only test of one's true mindset. In the course of their interactions, no matter if it was Chen Changsheng, Xuanyuan Po, or even the cold and indifferent Zhexiu, they all felt the heartfelt desire to protect the Orthodox Academy from this young prince. As a result, the two sides began to grow more familiar with each other.

But time could not change all things. For instance, the rocks in a latrine would always be stinky and hard. Tang Thirty-Six still did

not like Prince Chen Liu, not even wanting to put up a pretense. Every time Prince Chen Liu visited the Orthodox Academy, he would speak a few taunts and jeers and then leave. Today saw the same scene. Regardless of how much Prince Chen Liu had trained himself, even he couldn't help but reveal an awkward expression.

Chen Changsheng felt rather embarrassed and said a few words of apology in place of Tang Thirty-Six. He then went off to look for him, wanting to ask just why he was acting like this. However, when he found Tang Thirty-Six in the depths of the Orthodox Academy's forest, he forgot to ask. This was because, in the end, this matter was not very important, and also because Tang Thirty-Six was currently doing something very strange.

Tang Thirty-Six was not hitting trees like Xuanyuan Po, nor did he seem ready to bury himself in the tree leaves and lay there for seven days and nights. He was crouched by a tree, forcefully shoving something into a hole in the tree. Chen Changsheng could clearly see that the item being shoved into the tree hole was a sword. Moreover, this was no ordinary sword, but a famous sword that Tang Thirty-Six had requested from him last night.

"What are you doing?" he asked in shock.

Without turning his head, Tang Thirty-Six replied, "I said to you before, I'm prepared to hide those swords of yours for future people to find."

Chen Changsheng said rather incredulously, "Recently, you've been asking me every two days for a sword...but I've never seen you return them. You've been hiding them all?"

Tang Thirty-Six wiped the edges of the tree hole, coarsely disguising it. After giving it a once-over, he felt rather satisfied and stood up. Turning towards Chen Changsheng, he said, "What else? Or can I take those broken swords of yours and sell them off to buy wine?"

Chen Changsheng was dumbfounded. "Those are my swords, quickly bring them back."

"All together, I've only asked for you a bit more than a hundred swords. Is there a need to be so tense?"

"I didn't know that you planned to hide those swords. I thought you wanted to borrow the sword intents to learn the sword styles, so I especially picked out the best swords for you..."

"So what? Look at you being so stingy! It's just a few old swords, and in these past two years, I've given you so much money."

"This isn't a question of money...even if you did want them, you should still tell me first! If I knew you were going to be so wasteful with them, there's no way I would have given them to you."

"Isn't that it right there? I clearly know that if I tell you, you won't give them to me, so what reason do I have to tell you the reason? You think I'm Xuanyuan Po, a fool!"

"I don't care. In any case, quickly find those swords again."

"I also don't care. Hiding swords is very tiresome, and to find them all again is very annoying. In addition, the latrine smells simply awful."

"You...actually hid my swords in the latrine!"

"Just pretend like you didn't hear that. At any rate, I'm too lazy to look."

"Then I'll go myself. Quickly tell me where those swords are hidden."

"Since they're hidden...of course I can't tell you the location. You have to find it yourself. If you can find it, then you're pretty good lah."

"Please don't use the word 'lah'."

["Luoluo dropped a big radish."](#)

(This is a sort of tongue twister. In pinyin, this line reads as 'Luoluo luoxia yi gen da luobo')

"You...in the future, don't discuss this thing anymore."

"If I become as stupid as you, I might not even amount to a radish."



"I'll ask you again about the swords."

"Hide-and-seek is very fun."

"...could it be that I did something wrong?"

"In any case, my advice to you is that even after you become Pope, you shouldn't go to White Emperor City."

"Why?"

"I'm worried that the White Emperor might swallow you."

"....."

"In fact, you're a fool, but it's said that fortune favors a fool, otherwise, if you really did marry Luoluo, that's the equivalent of marrying a tigress, and imagine how your life would be then."

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# Chapter 503 – Life Is The Past

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Amidst farewells and noisy arguments, time passed.

Although there was still no sign that Su Li and those southerners he represented had abandoned those convictions they had held fast to for countless years, everyone could already see through countless details that the confluence of north and south was now inevitable. At this time, a relatively trifling matter actually managed to suppress this grand affair.

It was called a trifling matter because it was that engagement.

According to the news from the Li Palace, during an extremely private conversation, the Pope had admitted that he had already annulled the engagement between Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

This news spread in secret through the capital and the various regions of the continent, but there was not a sliver of evidence. However, the continued silence of the Divine General of the East's estate and the Orthodox Academy gradually caused people to believe it.

At the Ivy Festival, the southern diplomatic mission had

proposed for Qiushan Jun. At that time, the still-unknown Chen Changsheng pushed open the door and entered, taking out his marriage contract. And then the White Crane had come.

From that point until the present, this engagement had become the talk of the entire continent because it involved the three youths of the human world with the greatest prospects and most outstanding talent, and it was also involved with many other matters: the Orthodoxy, Holy Maiden Peak, the Divine Empress, the Qiushan clan, and the Mount Li Sword Sect. It could be said that the great powers of the continent had all been connected by this engagement.

Could it possibly just end like this?

If this matter was true, that it was Chen Changsheng who had gone of his own volition to the Pope and asked him to annul the engagement, how could the Divine General of the East's estate that had been ridiculed for so long deal with it? Now that the Heavenly Phoenix beloved, even worshiped, by all was confronted with this embarrassing situation, what was she feeling at this moment?

Because of these rumors, many people became very angry at Chen Changsheng, especially those worshipers of Xu Yourong.

But in the end, they were still rumors. No one could go up to the Pope and ask him directly, and so there was naturally no reason to go to the Orthodox Academy and give vent to their spleen.

Even if people wanted to confront Chen Changsheng and ask him

just whether this was all true or not, it was very difficult to find Chen Changsheng. As a result, all these emotions could only settle and ferment. Perhaps anger, perhaps ridicule, or perhaps just looking forward to the spectacle—for all sorts of reasons and emotions, the entire continent increasingly began to look forward to Xu Yourong's return to the capital, to look forward to the battle between the two that seemed decreed by fate.

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Chen Changsheng truly was very difficult to meet, because in the past few days, he rarely emerged, especially after the rumor of him asking the Pope to annul the engagement began to circulate.

Because of this matter, he felt rather apologetic towards Xu Yourong. Because she was a young lady, he resolved to maintain his silence and await Xu Yourong's return to the capital, thinking of some way to tell her the true facts of the matter. He would let her bring up the matter of his annulling the engagement before the entire world, and then he would take it from there. If it were done this way, perhaps she would not need to bear those strange gazes, even if they were gazes filled with pity. As for the inevitable jeers and sympathy that would befall one party of the engagement, he might as well take it. After all, he was a man.

For some reason, he had never met Xu Yourong, but he was very certain that she was not someone who would take the sympathy of others.

So when Tang Thirty-Six heard the rumors and came to ask, he only shook his head in reply.

As for the matter of engagements or the affection between others, the youth that had left the capital had not understood. Only after the Garden of Zhou did he know that these were both the same thing.

He loved a girl, that girl was dead.

He was once loved by a girl, that girl had left.

He hoped that the girl Xu Yourong would be more fortunate than him.

In this span of time, he did his utmost to avoid contact with other people, instead choosing to meet with the Black Dragon much more.

He would often to go to the space below the well at New North Bridge, bringing the Black Dragon all sorts of food, especially the big rice pan of the Orthodox Academy that she had mentioned by name.

Every time the Black Dragon feigned a gentle and quiet manner as it slowly ate, he would always crouch by the stone wall, researching the formation and chains that kept the Black Dragon imprisoned. It was just that he never made any headway.

On a certain night in the transition from autumn to winter, it was already three o'clock and three-quarters of an hour, yet Chen Changsheng was still not asleep.

He stood by the window, gazing at the great banyan tree already bare of leaves, and the lake which was already beginning to develop a thin crust of ice. He was thinking about some things, then heard the sound of singing coming from the other side of the wall.

Recently, he had often been able to hear these singing voices at night. He shook his head.

The Orthodox Academy had already become a famous sight of the capital. Because of the momentary pause in matches, far fewer people from the capital had come to sightsee, though the tourists from the outlying counties didn't decrease but actually increased. Adding together the students and lecturers of the Orthodox Academy, as well as the laborers, there were at least several hundred people. Where there was people, there was a business opportunity, and businessmen would never pass up on any opportunity. The shopfronts along the street directly across from Hundred Flowers Lane had all been bought or rented out, then remodeled into all sorts of business. There were inns and restaurants, and with each passing day, it grew ever livelier.

Every day, the inns and restaurants would do great business into the night. Some of their patrons were extremely famous people, but of course, even more were students of the Orthodox Academy. No matter how strict the academy's rules and how tightly the gate

was guarded, students would always find means of obtaining victory over the gatehouse and the academy's walls and then enter those inns and restaurants and do those things young people love to do.

Like eating, drinking, enjoying music, chatting about life, stuff like that...

Naturally, the teachers of the Orthodox Academy wished to control the students, but couldn't. They also wished to expel those restaurants which brought so much activity, but it was very arduous. Not the Orthodoxy cavalry, the City Gate Department, nor the Imperial Guard could deal with those restaurants. As for Tang Thirty-Six, who truly possessed the ability to completely settle those restaurants and inns across from Hundred Flowers Lane, it wasn't convenient for him to appear, because two of those restaurants and one of those inns were opened by him.

Late at night, it was still bustling. The singing coming from the other side of the wall grew louder and clearer, drifting into the Orthodox Academy.

Chen Changsheng was just thinking about finding those velvet earplugs that Mo Yu had left here one night and stuff them in his ears to help him sleep, when he was suddenly allured by the words of that song.

The singer was probably one of the new students of the Orthodox Academy. His voice was very poor and he was probably still in the period where his voice was changing, but his voice was very loud. The lyrics of this song were very simple. They couldn't be



described as elegant and could even be said to be rather crude, but they were filled with a flavor particular to youth. When paired with that young man's voice, the song seemed especially bursting with vigor and energy.

"[Youthful teens are all kinds of red](#), you are the hero, if you want rain, it must rain, if you want wind, there must be wind, the carp that leaps over the Dragon Gate must be different..."

(These are lyrics from the song 样样红 by the Chinese singer Huang An.)

Chen Changsheng stood by the window and quietly listened.

Listening to this song, he thought of the people and things he had encountered in his two years in the capital. He found it hard to keep calm as countless emotions surged forward like the tide.

Yes, surging forward like the tide.

He had once believed that this sort of description was an over-exaggeration of romance stories, but now he knew that it was all true.

He subconsciously caressed the stone pearls on his wrist and returned to the Garden of Zhou.

In the past few days, he often went to the Garden of Zhou, sitting on the plain in a daze.

Perhaps it was because he felt that it was much easier to communicate with those monsters than with humans.

Those monsters were very obedient. In accordance with his plans, they dredged the waterways and restored the plains and lakes. Adding on the self-repair that came with the reopening of the garden, the Garden of Zhou had already regained some of its old appearance.

The reason he was willing to spend his incomparably precious time and energy in the Garden of Zhou was that he wished to leave a memorial.

He stood at the end of the Mausoleum of Zhou's Divine Path, watching as below, the Mountain-toppling Fiend directed the tens of thousands of monsters in repairing the White Grass Path.

The monsters were a dense, black mass.

He felt this sight rather familiar, then he recalled that back then, he was here with her, watching as the monsters surged forward from the plain like a tide.

Thus, sorrow and longing surged forward like a tide.

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On the official road to the south of the capital, a convoy formed of several dozen carriages was majestically advancing.

Several hundred cavalry of the south, riding dragonblood horses, kept vigilant watch over the surroundings, protecting the convoy.

Several dozen disciples from South Stream Temple, as well as the representatives of the various powers of the south, were sitting within the carriages.

The carriage in the very middle of the convoy clearly possessed the highest status because this carriage was being pulled by eight snow-white pegasi.

This carriage was huge, so it was more appropriate to call it an imperial carriage.

Xu Yourong sat within.

Her black hair spilled over her shoulders, contrasting against her skin that was like white jade.

The common people enjoyed using the phrase 'an appearance like a painting' to describe beautiful women, but her beauty was impossible to be rendered by ink and brush.

Her eyelashes were very long, her lips very red. Her face was

flawless, her beauty pristine, yet it would place no pressure upon others.

Because her beauty was very serene.

Just like a tea hill after the rain, the surface of a lake right before a rain, the mists of Holy Maiden Peak, the smoke rising from the chimneys of a small village.

Her return to the capital this time was to bring the world an incomparably important piece of information.

In the past few days, both the Great Zhou and the South had been making preparations for the confluence of north and south, and the information she brought were the prerequisites, or permissions, for all this.

And then, she had to attend an appointment, an appointed battle.

The entire continent, even the demon princes of Xuelao City, was waiting to watch that battle.

In the view of many, compared to Demon Princess Nanke, that person was her true fated enemy.

Because he was once her fiancé, and now he had, in the eyes of many, annulled the engagement. He was a cold man that had brought her disgrace.

The convoy suddenly stopped. With several soft noises, a woman lifted the curtain and sat in the carriage. Looking at Xu Yourong with complex emotions, she said, "Martial Niece, we're almost at the capital."

The woman was an elder of the South Stream Temple's outer sect, He Qingbo, her cultivation at the middle level of Star Condensation.

Upon saying this, He Qingbo suddenly remembered something and revealed a tense expression. She said rather embarrassedly, "Qingbo misspoke, I ask the temple master for forgiveness."

"Martial Aunt does not need to be so polite."

Xu Yourong looked at her and calmly said, then walked out of the carriage.

As she moved, her black hair and her white ceremonial clothes floated in the air.

The front edge of her hair was incredibly neat, as if it had been cut by the sharpest sword. As it swayed back and forth, it made the expression in her eyes seem all the calmer and more powerful.

Her white ceremonial clothes were tied at the waist by a belt woven with many stars. There was no matching sword because she had come to the capital precisely to get a sword.

The Tong Bow rested in a corner of the carriage. She did not carry it in her hands because, for the moment, she did not want a certain person in the capital to see it.

That corner also held an umbrella.

Reaching the official road, she turned her gaze to that faintly discernible city on the horizon, slowly bringing her hands behind her back.

The capital had no city walls, nor did it have a city gate in any meaningful sense, so when she was small, she was mystified as to why there was a City Gate Department.

With her appearance, the surrounding cavalry of the South dismounted as quickly as possible and kneeled on the ground.

The South Stream Temple disciples that had gotten off the carriages and those ministers also began to kneel.

They kneeled because they had to pay their respects.

"Paying respects to the Holy Maiden."

Xu Yourong was still looking at the capital.

It had already been several years since she had last been back, but

she was still no stranger to the capital.

Because her home was here, Mo Yu, the Princess of Ping, and many of the people she knew when she was small were here, the Empress was here, and now that guy was also here.

Two streaks suddenly appeared in the azure sky, one white and one gray, flying into the capital.

Seeing this, she came back to earth and realized that everyone was paying respects to her.

It had already been a few days since that incident, but she was still not used to it. She didn't know what words she could use to respond to these devout and respectful greetings.

Suddenly, she recalled that plain in the Garden of Zhou, those words she would often say when she was being carried on that guy's back. At the time, she would never forget to say those words to that guy, because those words represented her most heartfelt wish. Perhaps...it was the most fitting response?

Consequently, she gazed at the crowd and said, "May the Sacred Light be with all of you."

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# Chapter 504 - The Holy Maiden Returns To The Capital

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[The sound of wind, rain and studying](#), but today, one would only be able to hear the sound of studying at the Orthodox Academy. The just-fallen snowflakes had descended far too gently. It took a while before the students in the classrooms saw them, drawing a burst of elated gasps. The lecturers from the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education said a few words of rebuke, thus suppressing the faint uproar. Yet in the next moment, the sound of howling wind came through the window, making it impossible to maintain silence and calm in the classrooms as the young students all rushed towards the windows.

(“The sound of wind, rain, and studying” is actually a reference to a famous line about the Donglin Academy: “风声雨声读书声，声声入耳；家事国事天下事，事事关心”，which translates to “The sound of wind, the sound of rain, the sound of studying, sound after sound enters one’s ear. The matters of home, the matters of state, the matters of the world, matter after matter is one’s concern.”)

The wind rolled up the thin mantle of snow that had just settled on the grass. A white crane slowly descended from the sky, almost seeming to dance in the sky. It was beautiful beyond compare.

"It's so beautiful!" the girls yelled excitedly as they gazed at this sight.

As the humans and demons surged in power, the monsters that had once wreaked devastation upon the continent had long been forced into the deep lakes and barren mountains. Correspondingly, the divine beasts and immortal birds also became harder to see.

Normally, only those sects located deep within the mountains would be able to see them. The new students of the Orthodox Academy mostly originated from the counties and provinces. When compared to the much worldlier people of the capital, they very rarely saw these legendary immortal birds. But there were still some people who had lived in the capital for a very long time. When the transfer student from the Heavenly Dao Academy, Chu Wenbin, saw that white crane, he recalled something and said in shock, "This...isn't this the White Crane of the Xu Estate?"

Upon hearing this, everyone by him grew quiet. Soon after, all the classrooms grew quiet. The students all stared at the White Crane, no longer daring to make any loud noises.

This White Crane was no ordinary white crane. Its appearance represented a name. To these students, that name was pure, holy and beautiful, forbidden to blaspheme.

Simultaneously, the students also knew just what this White Crane's return signified to their principal.

Just as expected, it didn't take long before a figure appeared before the students' eyes.

Chen Changsheng walked to the lawn by the lake and stood in front of the White Crane. The White Crane nodded its head at him and then inclined it towards those students at the nearby library and by the window. It seemed rather bewildered, as if it couldn't understand how such a massive change had occurred in the span of just a year.

He looked at the White Crane in silence, then finally asked, "She...came back?"

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Two streaks had entered the capital, one white and one gray. The white was the White Crane, but the gray was actually the Golden-winged Great Peng that Xu Yourong had brought out of the Garden of Zhou.

The reason it was gray was that the Great Peng had not fully matured. Its feathers had not taken color, let alone begin flowing with that golden color. It looked dark and gray and was also rather small. Just like Chen Changsheng's initial reaction towards it, it looked like a pheasant.

As they entered the capital, the White Crane only needed to cry out for those Red Falcons preparing to fly up to intercept to naturally let it pass. However, this young Peng not only did not follow the White Crane to the Orthodox Academy, but also seemed to grow rather interested in these birds of the "same kind" as it that guarded the Imperial City. It made a rapid turn in the air, its wings aflutter, and eventually landed on the walls of the palace.

It was said that a Phoenix in dire straits was not the match of a pheasant. This young Peng really did seem like a pheasant, but, ultimately, a Phoenix was a Phoenix, a Golden Peng was a Golden

Peng, so there was no way it could really have become a pheasant.

It folded its wings, raised its head and puffed out its chest, then began walking towards that flock of Red Falcons. It glanced to its left and right, its eyes indifferent and seeming exceptionally proud and unyielding.

The Red Falcons were the most powerful attack birds raised by the Great Zhou Army. They possessed an unimaginable speed and a naturally proud and valiant disposition. Even when confronting a foe far more powerful than they, they would show no fear. It was said that in the war of extermination with the demons a thousand years ago, the then-Demon Commander had raised a Sky Monster. In the end, at the cost of several dozen Red Falcons, it was pecked to death in the sky. Yet now as they looked at this rather small bird that looked just like a pheasant, their head feathers all went erect as they became incredibly vigilant. Even the Imperial Guards at their side could feel their fear. As for those Red Geese perched in the pavilion to the side, their reaction was even more extreme. They were so frightened that they fell paralyzed to the ground and were unable to stand back up.

What sort of bird was this? The Imperial Guards were quite confused. They warily watched, subconsciously tightening the grips on their spears.

At this moment, the Red Cloud Qilin, sitting by the palace walls and gazing off vacantly at the Black Goat, suddenly raised its head upwards.

In his room, Xue Xingchuan, who had been intently polishing his

spear, seemed to sense this action and also gazed upwards.

On the palace wall, the young Peng suddenly stopped, because it had sensed a murderous intent.

It looked towards the ground, its gaze falling upon the Red Cloud Qilin. It felt that this would be a little troublesome.

Then he noticed the origin of that murderous intent and looked towards that room. It realized that this would be incredibly troublesome.

If the Golden Peng was fully matured, it would naturally have completely disregarded the Red Cloud Qilin's provocation, and it would also have not been afraid of Xue Xingchuan. Now, though, it could not.

When it saw that Black Goat on the lawn of the Imperial Palace, its gray feathers instantly puffed up a little, and it was overcome by an intense uneasiness.

True enough, the world outside the Garden of Zhou was still just as brimming with dangers as the world it remembered, especially this capital of the humans—it was exactly the same as before. It had just come down to amuse itself, yet how had it run into so many troubles? Just as the Imperial Guards were coming with spears to force it away, it opened its wings and flew down the walls of the palace. With only a moment's effort, it had rushed past the plaza in front of the palace, flew over several princely estates and three streets, and descended into a distant street.

People were currently shouting in that street and the street was incredibly lively. Standing on the palace walls, one could faintly make out an ornate imperial carriage slowly making its way through the street.

The soldiers watched as the strange bird landed on the imperial carriage. Only then did they realize that it had actually come from Holy Maiden Peak. No wonder it's so frightening, they thought.

An official hurried over, reporting on some news he had just learned.

"The previous Holy Maiden abdicated? She let Xu Yourong succeed to the post?"

Hearing this news, Xue Xingchuan gazed in the direction of that street. A little shocked, he thought, did something happen at South Stream Temple? Why did such a massive change occur?

To the disciples of South Stream Temple and the common folk of the South, Xu Yourong was the future Holy Maiden. To the common folk of the capital of the Great Zhou, Xu Yourong was their pride. Because she had grown up between these two locations, as the news that Xu Yourong had formally succeeded to the position of Holy Maiden of the South gradually spread, the people of the capital that lined both sides of the street in welcome became momentarily silent out of shock and then exploded into cheers that shook the heavens and the earth.

Children ran alongside the imperial carriage, young women waved handkerchiefs and flowers. Pious worshippers knelt down at places the imperial carriage had passed, incessantly murmuring prayers of blessing, while the gazes of young men were scorching hot. Even though the wind was mixed with snowflakes, even though the weather was so cold, it was impossible to dampen the passion blazing in the capital today. And when the wind raised the curtain of the imperial carriage, revealing the indistinct figure of the maiden within, the mood became ardent to the extreme. Many people ceased to care for the Li Palace priests' rebukes, the obstructions of the City Gate Department's cavalry, or the wary gazes of the southern cavalry. One by one, they squeezed towards the center of the street. Although they were still all ultimately blocked by the cavalry, the cavalry could not block the items in their hands.

In a moment, flowers that were exceptionally difficult to see in the depths of winter fell down like rain. In just a few moments, the imperial carriage carrying Xu Yourong became a sea of flowers.

Those fruits washed clean were continuously thrown, free of charge, to those hundred-odd carriages. In one of the carriages in the back, Ye Xiaolian caught a cherry tomato and lightly took a bite. She found it both sweet and sour and very tasty, and her eyes squinted in pleasure. Of course, just like her other senior sister sitting with her in the carriage, her pleasure was even more a result of the passion of the capital's populace. In light of how the Holy Maiden was so revered by the people of Zhou, after the confluence of the north and south, Holy Maiden Peak's status might not fall and might even improve. The unease caused by the temple master floating away was suddenly greatly dispelled. With seventy percent pleasure and thirty percent pride, they commented, "Not even the sight when Zhou Yuren entered the

capital was probably as great as this."

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"Back then when Zhou Yuren entered the capital, Zhou Yuren really was almost adored to death. I remember that I was still young back then. I remember standing together with my cousin on the upper floor of Clear Lake Restaurant trying to catch a peek. That excitement..."

Perhaps because she saw Xu Yourong and began to recall her young self, the Tianhai Divine Empress fell into a very rare moment of nostalgia, but it was only a moment. She quickly returned to her normal serene appearance, saying, "If you don't want to be adored to death, you must get a thicker skin and also a stronger posture."

In the eyes of the people, Xu Yourong was always quiet and calm like a fairy. Only in front of her teacher the Holy Maiden and the Empress would she act the most natural. She replied, "A thick skin...that's not that great of a thing."

The Divine Empress looked at her, her eyes warm and gentle. She said tenderly, "What's so good about having thin skin? Look at how your little face is blushing."

This conversation naturally had some deeper meaning. Both the



thicker skin and the stronger posture were the Divine Empress's advice.

In the Divine Empress's view, to sit stably on the seat of temple master of South Stream Temple and to ultimately become the Holy Maiden recognized by the entire South, to be heartless and cruel was an absolute must.

A thicker skin was to be heartless, and only by having a strong enough posture would ruthless methods have force.

"If we want to make our postures stronger, should we not begin eating?"

Mo Yu stood at the side, serving the food. Seeing Xu Yourong's dazed appearance, she knew that she either did not want to respond or perhaps had emptied her mind again like when she was small. Chuckling, Mo Yu changed the subject.

The Divine Empress sighed, "Children nowadays don't like to hear the talk of us old folks."

Xu Yourong softly replied, "Empress is not old, Empress will never be old."

On the side, Mo Yu shivered. "I haven't met you for a few years, but that little mouth of yours is still so sweet."

"When eating, don't talk."

The Divine Empress took up her chopsticks and ferried some food into Xu Yourong's bowl, then also began to eat.

In such a vast palace hall, devoid of eunuchs or maids, the space seemed very empty with just the three of them.

Especially after they began to eat. There was no more noise, causing a strange atmosphere to settle over them.

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# Chapter 505 - The Divine Empress's Teachings

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After Mo Yu finished laying out the food, she scooped out a bowl of rice for herself and sat down across from Xu Yourong.

The two glanced each other in the eye and smiled.

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six would have found this strange atmosphere unbearable, but they had long been used to it.

Just like it had been many years ago, when the Empress ate, she was very strict, forbidding anyone from speaking. They could only communicate with their eyes.

Xu Yourong and Mo Yu didn't know how many times they had communicated with their eyes. A tacit understanding had formed between them long ago and it was very easy for them to see what the other person was thinking.

It was just that their communications often talked about things like 'today, this dish was quite tasty, that dish wasn't tasty'; 'the Empress's mood seems rather good today, she's already eaten three chopsticks of swallow tongue'; 'the Empress said last night that she was going to deprive the Prime Minister of his position, it seems that it's going to come true, or why else would her mood be so melancholy that she can't even drink down her favorite jade soup?' But today, they were communicating with each other over another matter.

Mo Yu blinked her eyes at Xu Yourong, asking just what she thought about Chen Changsheng and that engagement.

Xu Yourong drooped her eyelashes as if she didn't notice, but the fingers holding her chopstick moved forward a little.

Mo Yu noticed this detail and began to sympathize with Chen Changsheng.

She clearly recalled that when Xu Yourong was small, whenever she was unhappy, she would subconsciously tighten her grip on her chopsticks. The tighter she gripped, the more her finger would move. There was one year when she saw little Xu Yourong grip her chopsticks like this. On the afternoon of that day, the palace where the Princess of Ping lived gained a dozen or so non-poisonous snakes, and that very night, the Princess of Ping's face was painted like that of an actor in an opera...

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The eunuchs and maids guarded the palace hall from a distance. They were not at all surprised by the scene within the hall and their expressions were unchanging.

There weren't many people worthy to eat together with the Divine Empress, and Xu Yourong was one of them.

This had nothing to do with her current status of Holy Maiden of the south. Ever since she was small, the Empress would often welcome her into the palace and then have a meal together. Back then, besides Xu Yourong, there was also Mo Yu, the Princess of Ping, and Prince Chen Liu. Later on, after Prince Chen Liu turned sixteen, he very rarely stayed overnight in the palace, and the occasions where he shared a meal with the Empress also decreased. As for the Princess of Ping...apparently, she had gone tonight out of the city to West Mountain Temple to burn incense. Anyone could see that this was because the Princess did not wish to see the Xu Yourong that she had envied and admired for so many years and had thus escaped.

After lunch, Mo Yu remained in the palace to organize files. The Divine Empress stood up and said to Xu Yourong, "Come with me."

Xu Yourong followed her as they went straight to the highest point in the capital.

Standing on the Dew Platform, seeing the streets and markets of the capital and the distant Mausoleum of Books, Xu Yourong recalled those scenes when she used to play here in her childhood, and a heartfelt smile appeared on her face.

"This is the first time you've smiled today."

The Divine Empress, her hands held behind her, stood at the edge of the Dew Platform, not having turned her head.

Xu Yourong restrained her smile and walked behind her. She slowly said, "The pressure came too suddenly and I don't know how to respond."

She was naturally speaking about succeeding to the position of Holy Maiden.

The Divine Empress declared, "The so-called Holy Maiden is merely a sacred idol. With your comprehension and ability, what's so difficult about it?"

Xu Yourong knew that this had always been the opinion of the Divine Empress with regards towards the position of Holy Maiden. Powerless to change it, she chuckled and said nothing.

"I actually do have some idea of where this pressure of yours is coming from." The Divine Empress turned around and stared at her. Remembering the scenes from the Garden of Zhou she had seen at the pool in the cold palace, she gave a faint smile. "The word that inflicts the most suffering is 'love'. If you can avoid it, you should avoid it."

Xu Yourong was a little startled. She felt that the Empress had seen something, but...that matter shouldn't have been known by anyone. Even he...didn't know, right?

The Divine Empress did not continue on this subject. Her gaze looked past Xu Yourong's shoulder and rested on those distant mountain peaks in the south that were gradually being covered in snow. She asked, "Before she left, did she leave any message for

me?"

Xu Yourong calmly replied, "Master said that she hoped Empress would not concern herself too much with matters of state and to live a few more days for yourself."

The Divine Empress was rather displeased with these words. Her voice a little chilly, she declared, "Truly a fool."

As it involved her own master, although Xu Yourong felt rather helpless, she still had to say a few words in defense.

The Divine Empress reminisced, "I recall that back then, the Chief Princess of the Great Western Continent was exceedingly excellent, so much so that her own younger brother dreaded and feared her. At the end, that piece of trash would even faint straight away upon glancing at her. Ultimately, though, she could do nothing. It was also because of the attitude of her parents that she grew discouraged and married off to the distant White Emperor City...it seems to me that your master is just as much a fool as she was."

Xu Yourong quietly thought, if the Chief Princess became Queen of the Great Western Continent, then compared to her current position as Empress of White Emperor City, just which life would be happier? Besides herself, who could say for sure?

"For a woman to survive in this world is not easy. For them to possess their own place is even harder. To be like us and stand at the peak of the world, that is an incredibly difficult challenge.

Putting aside that idiot Wuqiong Bi, your master's talent, perception, and intelligence are one in ten thousand. I originally thought that she would be different from the rest of those silly women, but the result? Such a smart woman, why can't she overcome the temptation of love?"

The Divine Empress's expression turned abnormally cold. "What does it mean to live out one's days? For what reason should women just live out their days?"

Xu Yourong remembered a matter from just before and softly said, "Martial Uncle Su said that the Empress would definitely speak this way. Even the wording is almost identical."

The Divine Empress perked her brows. "Oh? What did that little, little Su say?"

In the present world, amongst the experts that had stepped into the Divine Domain, Su Li and the Holy Maiden of the south were half a generation later than the Pope and the Divine Empress. Coupled with their complex attitudes towards Su Li, the Saints, with the exception of the Holy Maiden, would always address him as little, little Su. It was like only this way could they reveal their anger towards Su Li.

Because in their view, Su Li was an annoyance.

"Martial Uncle Su wanted me to say to the Empress..." Xu Yourong glanced at her, then continued, "To live a solitary life is no good. What need is there to force yourself to do it?"



Hearing these words of Su Li, the Divine Empress fell silent for a very long time. Suddenly, she began to laugh, her laugh brimming with openness and scorn.

"Empress, you also shouldn't blame Master. For her to persuade Martial Uncle Su to travel with her around the world is already not easy."

Last year at the beginning of autumn, both the Great Zhou Dynasty and the various powers of the south began to make their preparations as if the confluence of the north and south was inevitable. At the time, many people, including such important figures as Xue Xingchuan who were involved in executing this matter, were puzzled as to why the Saints were pushing this matter when Su Li was still clearly at Mount Li. Yet not one pondered Su Li's attitude.

As it turned out, it had been because the Holy Maiden had persuaded Su Li to travel away with her from the grudges and quarrels of the secular world and to no longer care about these things.

The Divine Empress had said that the Holy Maiden of the south had failed to overcome the temptation of love. In truth, Su Li had also failed to overcome it.

The word 'love' had served as a restraint, as the prerequisite for the confluence of north and south.

The Divine Empress felt quite strongly on this matter, so her words were extremely tough and derisive. "The finest years of your master's life were spent pent up in Holy Maiden Peak, while he was outside, eating, drinking and being merry. For so many years, he lived such a free and happy life, finding a Demon Princess for a lover and even having a daughter. Nothing was delayed for him, and finally, after he got tired of playing around, he turned his head back to find her again, and then went once more to watch the sunset in the twilight! Tell me, how beautiful is that! Everyone says that ruling the country is like playing Go, but even if it is, I wouldn't take such an exchange with my enemy. It just isn't worth it."

In this world, the number of people of the same sex as her that she could communicate with in the spiritual world was just two. Just like that, there was now one less, and it was even because of a man, the reason that she found the most impossible to accept.

Xu Yourong did not respond because it was her elder that was being discussed, and also because...there were truthfully times when she felt the same.

"She just left like this, leaving a little girl like you behind. Could she not be worried?"

The Divine Empress gazed at Xu Yourong and arched her brows. "Ultimately, isn't it up to me to be concerned? Truly, one turns stupid after getting with a man. In comparison, there's no one smarter than me."

Xu Yourong smiled. "In any case, I was also taught by the

Empress. It's also fine if the Empress teaches me for a few more years."

"Not teach, exchange."

The Divine Empress nodded her head at her. This was a sign of respect.

Xu Yourong was shocked, but quickly calmed down and returned the nod.

She was not a Saint, but she was already the Holy Maiden of the south.

From this moment on, she and the Empress conversed on equal levels, even if only on the surface.

"Since you're the Holy Maiden of the south, you must think for the sake of the southerners, as this is your true foundation, even if...you must oppose me in the future."

"I understand."

"Just as I said in the beginning, men cannot stand seeing us standing so high above. As a result, all the Holy Maidens before your master would basically rarely leave South Stream Temple. On the surface, they studied the Heavenly Tome Monoliths and forgot worldly affairs. In reality, they all clearly understood that to guarantee their continued existence was good, but that they also

couldn't let their existence grow too strong. If you don't wish to become a sacred idol, you cannot act this way."

"Then how should I act?"

"Men do not like to see us standing so high above, so we must stand high above, and we have to step on them until they can't even speak or even dare to respond."

The Divine Empress expressionlessly declared.

Xu Yourong knew that these seemingly crude and simple words were the Empress's will, a warning concerning her future life as Holy Maiden, but...it was even more a demand for the battle that was soon to come.

She could not lose to Chen Changsheng.

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Chen Changsheng sat by the Orthodox Academy lake, in a daze.

The White Crane stood next to him, also in a daze.

Tiny snowflakes flew down from the sky and fell upon the White

Crane, increasing its sacred aura. They fell upon his body, making it seem like his hair had gone white from worry.

"What should I do?" Depressed, he looked to the White Crane and asked, "If I really can't avoid it, if I really have to fight her, how should I fight?"

The White Crane slightly tilted its head and looked at him. It was like it was saying, "You should be asking this of her, not me."

He thought it over for a very long time. Ultimately, he softly whispered to himself, "If it's really no good, then I should just lose to her?"

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In the shower of snow, Xu Yourong walked amongst the streets of the capital, an umbrella in her hand.

There was no South Stream Temple disciple at her side, nor was there any priest of the Li Palace or bodyguard from the Imperial Palace. She walked alone.

For some reason, even though she had not changed her appearance, elegant and beautiful as a fairy, she attracted the gaze of no one and no one realized her identity.

The people in the food stalls by the streets, the workers eating noodles on their doorsteps—it was like none of them could see her under the umbrella.

Perhaps it was because of the strange fringe of the umbrella in her hand. The umbrella was rather old and covered in dust. It was the Yellow Paper Umbrella.

# Chapter 506 - Returned Home, Yet Thinking About Eleven Streets Away

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While she was crossing the Bridge of Helplessness, she was almost run into by an auntie hurrying home to avoid the snow. Just as the auntie was about to fall over, Xu Yourong extended a hand to support her.

It was only then that the auntie realized that there was a girl holding an umbrella on this snowy bridge. As she was saying her thanks, she saw the thin dress the girl was wearing and said in concern, "My lady is wearing so little—aren't you cold?"

Xu Yourong shook her head. Holding up the umbrella, she continued her walk through the snow.

As she walked from the Imperial Palace to the southern section of the city, she saw the familiar streetscapes from her childhood. When she crossed a stone bridge, she saw the overhanging eaves of her home and its walls that had clearly just been whitewashed.

Even she who so carefully guarded the serenity of her Dao heart could not help but feel a little disconcerted.

From the moment they knew that the diplomatic mission from the south had entered the capital, the middle gate of the Divine General of the East's estate had been opened wide. Without mentioning the crowd that had braved the snow to wait on the streets, just speaking of the stewards and subordinates of the Divine General's estate, even their eyes were about to turn green

from anticipation.

Carrying the umbrella, Xu Yourong walked over. Under the eyes of the entire crowd, she walked into the Divine General of the East's estate.

No one was able to tell just how she had gotten in. Those stewards and subordinates who had busied themselves for dozens of days in preparation for this day were all stupefied. Just who was this person?

With a rustle, she folded her umbrella and then lightly knocked it against the gate of the estate, shaking the snow from the surface of the umbrella to the ground.

With a sob, Shuang'er shot through the gate. However, because she had been standing for quite a few hours, her two legs were rather sore. In her flustered state, when she arrived in front of Xu Yourong, she could barely stand straight and almost kneeled in front of her.

Xu Yourong held out a hand to support her, asking, "You've never been so courteous in the past. In the few years that I haven't been here, who has been teaching you the rules?"

Of course, she was just teasing, but Shuang'er couldn't even manage a smile. She could only persistently sob and then, feeling her actions rather humiliating, incessantly wipe her face with her sleeve. In an instant, the makeup that had been applied with such meticulous care was ruined.



Finally, the people of the estate began to react. Nanny Hua quickly stepped forward, her lips trembling, but she couldn't manage any words.

"The Young Lady has returned!"

Someone yelled out, the firecrackers were instantly lit, and fireworks illuminated the somewhat gloomy snowy sky.

In the clamor, another person yelled, "We can't call her 'Young Lady', we have to call her 'Holy Maiden'!"

"We respectfully welcome the Holy Maiden!"

Seeing the swiftly closing middle gate, the crowd that had been waiting in the snow for so long instantly dispersed, traveling to various places to spread the news.

The Phoenix had returned home.

"You're wearing so little, what happens if you freeze?"

Madam Xu led Xu Yourong along by hand, her face deeply concerned as tears dripped from her face."

"How could my family's little Phoenix be frozen by the ordinary winds and unrefined snow of the human world?"

Xu Shiji said with a smile as he lightly stroked his beard. He seemed the very picture of a proud and gentle father. He sighed, "We haven't seen each other for several years; you've grown so much. You actually...really did become the Holy Maiden."

Upon her entering South Stream Temple, he and many others had basically confirmed that his daughter would become the Holy Maiden of the south in the future, but he had not expected the day to come so quickly. With this single thought, he couldn't help but get excited. He was seventy percent proud and pleased, thirty percent free and relaxed. He knew in his heart that even if he were to now have other thoughts, the Divine Empress would not treat him as she did before and at least allow him to preserve a little face. As for the Tianhai clan and those grand ministers in the Imperial Court, would any of them dare persist in ridiculing him behind his back? As for those fellows that had once embarrassed him...he suddenly thought of Chen Changsheng and his mood abruptly turned sour and his complexion turned rather ugly.

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In everyone's imagination, the Holy Maiden was inevitably possessed of an unearthly beauty, holy and dignified, conscientious with her words and laughter, and sitting upright and still. Although this innate impression was not necessarily correct, it was already impossible to shatter. Although it was impossible for Xu Yourong to do as her junior and senior sisters did and walk as if untouched by the wind and seem as clean as a white lotus, on the

few occasions when she appeared before the masses, even she would pay close attention to her words and actions, doing her utmost to only smile without speaking. Only in front of the Divine Empress and her master the Holy Maiden could she act more naturally, to act like a member of the junior generation and speak of interesting things. Moreover, it was only in front of Shuang'er, the maid who she had grown up with, that she could truly relax, just like now.

She was currently rolling around on a bed, her black hair flying every which way. At the end, she opened her arms and lay flat on the bed, sighing, "Ah, it's still this bed that's comfortable to sleep in."

"Young Lady, this is far too inelegant."

Shuang'er quickly found a blanket to cover her and then sat by the bed, looking at her in a daze. She was very happy, but for some reason, the rims of her eyes were gradually turning red.

Xu Yourong asked, "Just what's going on? Could there really be somebody that dares to bully you?"

She had asked this question as soon as she entered the estate, but she had just been joking then. She was keenly aware that she could search the Xu Estate from top to bottom and not find anyone who would dare bully Shuang'er. Because of the orders she had left back then, even her mother would not treat Shuang'er poorly. But now it seemed that matters were not as Xu Yourong had imagined, so she naturally wished to know what was going on.

Shuang'er wiped her tears, looking at her as if hesitating to say something. Finally, she sadly said, "But if someone bullies the Young Lady, what then?"

Xu Yourong giggled, "The foolish little girl is still so foolish! Who dares to bully me? You don't know, in the Garden of Zhou when I encountered Nanke, the Demon Princess that I mentioned in the latter, if it was one on one, I could definitely..."

"Young Lady, you know who I'm talking about," Shuang'er interrupted.

Xu Yourong sat up and slowly began to tie up her black hair. She then wrapped her arms around her legs and fell silent, thinking about something.

Shuang'er was very aware that when the Young Lady was small, she would often fall into a daze like this when alone. Just like when she was small, seeing this made one want to protect her. It was a completely different image from the calm and imposing manner that was displayed before the populace.

Seeing her young lady do this now, Shuang'er couldn't help but grow uneasy. "Young Lady, I didn't intentionally plan to make you angry. Don't think about it anymore."

Xu Yourong looked at the bright lantern on the table and suddenly announced, "There's something I want to ask you."

Shuang'er asked, "What thing?"

Xu Yourong turned her head to look at Shuang'er and calmly asked, "Back then, you said, he and Princess Luoluo were in the Orthodox Academy...did you personally see it?"

Rather nervously, Shuang'er implored her, "Young Lady, it's so difficult for you to come home even once; just what's the meaning in mentioning that disciple of shamelessness?"

Although it had not been acknowledged, the phrase 'disciple of shamelessness' was seemingly enough to illustrate many things.

Xu Yourong no longer asked any questions. Hugging her knees, she gazed silently out the window at the falling snowflakes for a very long time.

If this were one of her previous returns to the capital, she would definitely have not wanted to go out again. However, today, for some reason, she didn't want to stick around in her home. She wanted to go out for a walk, go out to see.

Perhaps it was because, compared to her last two returns, the capital had some places that were different. For example, the Weiyang Palace had many more Night Pearls than in her childhood. Or that a bridge pier of the Bridge of Helplessness had been struck by a boat last summer and had gotten somewhat crooked, but was now being repaired. Or how the trees by New North Bridge had gotten much lusher for some reason. Or that the

old gate of the Orthodox Academy covered in ivy had been replaced by a new gate...

Or how that guy was in the capital.

Separated from her by eleven straight streets.

If an ordinary person were to walk it, they would only need an hour, and this was with the snow making the road slippery.

If she walked, she would only need a few moments.

If she rode the White Crane, then it would require an even shorter time, just the blinking of an eye.

The snow outside the window suddenly grew flurried, as did her emotions. She blinked her eyes and realized that the White Crane had landed in the courtyard.

She stood up and draped a cloak over shoulders, then walked out. Shuang'er hurriedly clasped the stove to her chest and followed.

On the snow, the White Crane was preening its feathers.

A strange and discordant cry resounded in the night, and the gray young Peng also descended. It had gone off to play somewhere, but only when it saw the White Crane did it also come flying over. The moment it reached the ground, it buried itself under the White

Crane's wings. It seemed like it was fawning over it and also like it was deliberately provoking it for attention. The White Crane straightened its neck, seeming very helpless, but it did not seem to possess any intention of driving the Peng away.

This small courtyard was a restricted area of the Divine General of the East's estate. Without Xu Yourong's approval, no one could enter, not even Xu Shiji or Madam Xu, so there was no need to worry that the young Peng would scare anyone.

"What bird is this?" Shuang'er asked as she looked at the plain, gray bird.

In her eyes, this bird really did seem rather ugly, but this White Crane well-known for its love of cleanliness actually did not shun this bird's intimacy. This made her rather shocked.

"A pheasant," Xu Yourong replied.

The young Peng stuck its head out from the White Crane's wings and shot her a bitter glance of resentment.

"Holy Maiden Peak truly is no ordinary place. The pheasants that live on the mountain actually look so vicious."

Shuang'er clapped her hands in praise, then suddenly remembered something. "Ah, then I'll go and prepare some more water and fruit. I originally only prepared it for the White Crane."

Hearing this, the resentment in the young Peng's gaze grew even heavier.

It had already lived out a vegetarian life at Holy Maiden Peak for half a year. Only occasionally when Xu Yourong went to the village to play mahjong could it avail itself of the opportunity to eat a little meat, eating things like dried meat or porkchop. Today, it had come to the flourishing capital and, as it flew over, it had seen so many appetizing and tender humans, and there were also those tough and nutritious cultivators. Its mouth was watering until it almost couldn't stand it, but it turned out...

It was still just going to eat fruit?

Although it must be known that it had never tasted human flesh in its entire life, the impressions left on its divine soul from its previous life were unforgettable.

"This pheasant likes to eat meat." Xu Yourong glanced at the young Peng.

It was just an ordinary glance, yet the young Peng felt like its soul had been washed in the coldest water for three days and nights. The burning desires that it had just begun to have all instantly vanished and it didn't even dare to think in that direction.

"If there's blue lobster in the house, get some for it to try."

The young Peng was ecstatic at these words and incessantly



swayed its head back and forth. The memories from its previous lives within its divine soul told it that the flesh of the blue lobster was incredibly delicious.

Shuang'er helplessly replied, "There is none."

Xu Yourong was a little surprised, thinking to herself, my family knows that I love eating the blue lobster of Clear Lake Restaurant. Logically, just as they did the last two times, they should have prepared some. Why isn't there any?

"It's impossible to eat blue lobster in the entire capital."

Shuang'er hesitated for a while, then finally said, "Because the Orthodox Academy bought Clear Lake Restaurant, so you can only eat it there."

Xu Yourong was taken aback. She had not expected...to so quickly hear the name of the Orthodox Academy.

The young Peng was thinking about what sort of place the Orthodox Academy was and that it should find the chance to eat up all the people within, then slowly take its time feasting on the blue lobster.

The White Crane suddenly let out a clear cry.

Xu Yourong realized that the White Crane had actually spent half the day at the Orthodox Academy. Presumably...it had been

playing around with that guy?

While Shuang'er went to get some other meat, she stood in the darkness, the cloak draped over her as snow fell, thinking about some things.

He was in the capital. Eleven streets, an hour, a moment, and she would be there.

# Chapter 507 - An Old Friend Comes With A Flurry Of Snow

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She had previously been thinking about these matters, but now that she thought about them again, she found them impossible to repress.

Of course she was not thinking about him, nor was she thinking about going to see him.

So she said to herself.

She was just a little curious to see him...he was up to, to know just how he had been getting on in the capital.

At the Mausoleum of Zhou, when she had been talking with that guy about Senior Qiushan and the engagement, she had mentioned that what she most cared about was following her heart.

Now, her heart was fixed, so she would naturally no longer hesitate. She returned to her room and changed her clothes, took up the umbrella, then began making her way through the snowy night, out of the courtyard.

Shuang'er, who was returning with a plate of veal, asked in shock, "Young Lady, at such a late hour, you still plan to go out?"

"Yes."

"Is Young Lady going to visit Grand Lady Mo?"

"...Yes."

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At night, the Orthodox Academy was very peaceful, but Hundred Flowers Lane outside the academy was bustling with activity. The lights of the restaurants shone upon the falling snowflakes, and coupled with the mists produced from the heat of the restaurants, the scene seemed somewhat fantastical. Holding the umbrella, Xu Yourong quietly stood at the end of the lane. With her white ceremonial clothes and her red cloak, she was this fantastical scene's most beautiful feature.

Because of the Yellow Paper Umbrella, no one could sense her existence. The people within the restaurants were not blessed to see such a beautiful sight. Naturally, they would also not have any misgivings. Just as they did every other day, they conversed with loud voices, happily guzzled their wine, called out to friends, and dallied with women. Although the sound of music would occasionally be interrupted, the joyous singing and jokes never ceased.

Hearing the lewd songs and romantic lyrics coming from the restaurant, Xu Yourong made a small frown.

She was very curious about the newly reborn Orthodox Academy and had many conjectures, but she had not imagined that just a wall away would be such a hive of scum and villainy.

"They all say he's been acting like a principal now, so why isn't he concerning himself with this?"

It was very inexplicable. Because of all this, she became rather dissatisfied with that guy.

With a gust of wind and a flurry of snowflakes, she noiselessly flew over the academy wall, those Orthodoxy cavalry patrolling in the snow completely unaware of her presence. As she landed within the academy, she was confronted by a lake, with a row of houses lined up along its shore. She could faintly smell the scent of firewood. She guessed that this should be the kitchen. She confidently strode over, confirmed that no one was within, and opened the door to take a look.

"The food really is rather good."

She looked at the food within the Orthodox Academy's kitchen and contentedly nodded her head, but she didn't sense that her own position was somewhat biased. (Author's note: The principal's wife carries out an inspection.)

When she saw those shells of blue lobsters piled up in the food preparation area, she finally believed Shuang'er's words.

She shook her head, thinking to herself, Clear Lake Restaurant really was moved over here. That young master of the Wenshui Tangs really is a strange person.

Hugging the lakeshore, she walked to the opposing shore. She saw the great banyan tree, and then she saw the lights and that building on the other side of the short wall.

She recalled the scenes he had mentioned in the snowy temple within the Plains of the Unsetting Sun and those matters he had talked about, as well as the rumors involving him. She supposed that the building was the library. It was in that building where he had found his own Fated Star.

Not far behind the great banyan tree was a house. Compared to the light and activity of the other places of the Orthodox Academy, this house was much more peaceful.

She pushed upon the door to the house and, carrying the Yellow Paper Umbrella, walked right in.

Then, she stopped.

This was the first floor. She paused in front of a door in the house. The scent of medicine seeped out from the seams of the door.

In the room behind the door was a bed.

Zhexiu was lying on the bed.

Although his injuries were gradually improving, the wounds of his meridians were not completely healed. As a result, he still needed to spend quite a bit of time quietly lying in bed.

Suddenly, he opened his eyes.

He slowly shifted his gaze towards the door, his expression exceptionally grave, like he was facing a powerful enemy.

His current expression reflected even more caution than when he faced that Demon General couple in the Garden of Zhou.

His gaze rested on the door, his pupils constricted.

His right hand slowly moved through the bedding, grabbing onto the Demon Commander's Banner Sword.

The moment he grasped the sword, many black hairs sprouted out from the back of his hand and his constricted pupils swiftly turned red.

He had finished his preparations for battle, even intending, without the slightest hesitation, to undergo his berserk metamorphosis, because he could clearly perceive that the person on the other side of the door was very powerful.

In terms of cultivation, that person was basically on the same level as him, yet it gave him a very dangerous feeling.

This was the heart of the problem.

Because of his peculiar bloodline and the ruthless environment in which he grew up, slaughter had been his constant companion since he was a child and he had hunted demons for a living. It could be said that the wolf youth Zhexiu was the young expert in the world most skilled at fighting or killing. As far as he was aware, as everyone was aware, no one at the same level of cultivation as him could defeat him. That he had still thought about how to kill Gou Hanshi, who was at Ethereal Opening, back when he was still not at the Ethereal Opening Realm was clear proof of this fact.

Yet now he felt that even if he were uninjured and returned to his peak strength, he was still no match for the person on the other side of the door.

This was a very strange feeling. He was sure that he had never exchanged blows with the person on the other side of the door, yet he also felt like he had exchanged blows with them countless times. Moreover...he had never won.

It was precisely this dangerous feeling and bizarre mood that made him sensitive, thus wary and even uneasy.

Just who was the person on the other side of the door?



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Carrying the Yellow Paper Umbrella, Xu Yourong quietly gazed at the door, saying nothing.

She had already guessed at who the occupant of the room was.

She and he had never met, but they had truthfully met many times.

They had met each other on the stone walls at the gates of the Six Ivies and every other school.

That place was the Proclamation of Azure Sky.

They had met each other at the very summit of the Proclamation of Azure Sky.

In the past three years, she had always been in first place on the Proclamation of Azure Sky, and that person had always been second.

If this were the past, she would definitely have not missed the opportunity to fight with him, but she knew at the moment that he was still heavily injured, so she naturally did not send out an

invitation.

After a moment, she turned and went upstairs, not concealing the sound of her footsteps.

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From the sound of the other person's footsteps, Zhexiu could hear that the person bore no ill will.

But just who was this person? Why had this person come to the Orthodox Academy in the night?

Suddenly, he recalled the news that had caused the greatest stir in the capital today as well as the White Crane that had stayed for half a day by the lake. His face was instantly filled with shock.

He abruptly recalled what Chen Changsheng was doing at this time, and his shock immediately transformed into sympathy and pity.

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Xu Yourong went straight to Chen Changsheng's room.

To her, this was not a very difficult task. It didn't require her to understand the special privileges of a principal. Just understanding him was enough.

She clearly recalled that when they were in the Garden of Zhou, no matter how exhausted or busy he was, running day and night to escape, when there was simply no time to take a bath, he would still do his utmost to keep his face and hands clean.

This level was very clean, incredibly clean, so clean that it could make someone a bit angry.

There were no spider webs, no scraps of paper, no trash, and not even any dust in the seams of the floorboards in the corner.

The floor of the corridor seemed even more like it had been washed with water ten times a day, so clean that one could almost see one's reflection in it.

Xu Yourong glanced at the dress she was wearing and grew somewhat uneasy. She thought to herself, do people obsessed with cleanliness all have a few abnormalities?

She walked towards that room. When her shoes landed on the corridor, they made no sound, only leaving behind the snow and mud that had stuck to them.

Reaching the door, she turned her head to take a look at the clear trail of footprints she had left on the clean corridor. A contented smile revealed itself on her face.

Confirming that no one was inside, she opened the door and walked into the room.

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# Chapter 508 - The Bamboo Dragonfly On The Bookshelf

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This was a very simple room. There was one bed, one desk, two bookshelves, one wardrobe, and three basins.

Being a girl, the first thing Xu Yourong did was open up the wardrobe.

The contents of the wardrobe were also very simple. They basically consisted of plain clothes, the majority being the school uniform of the Orthodox Academy. Besides the faint scents of soap, there was no other fragrance.

She was very pleased with all this, but when she saw the fifty towels and handkerchiefs neatly stacked at the bottom of the wardrobe, she was still very quiet for a long time.

Closing the wardrobe, she walked to the bookshelves. She randomly pulled out a few books and realized that they were all novels on ghosts and the supernatural that had been quite popular in the capital in these past few years. This caused her to fall into another bout of silence.

He had become well-read in the Daoist Canon as a child, so now he didn't think about advancing anymore?

Suddenly, she saw a small item on the bookshelf and her expression went blank.

It was a bamboo dragonfly. It was clearly very old and had already begun to yellow. It even seemed to have been soaked in water, its edges almost rotted away...she felt it to be rather familiar. After thinking about it for a long time, she remembered that when she was very small, she had placed it in a letter that she had sent to him.

As she reminisced over those matters of the past, she grew somewhat frustrated. Seeing how after so many years, this bamboo dragonfly had been preserved by him...fine, he didn't preserve it that well, but he still managed to preserve it. Was he a person that did things for old times' sake? She was rather pleased, but for some reason, she soon afterwards became rather angry. After a moment, she came to her senses. The reason she was angry was herself, so should she be angry or happy? She contemplated this problem, unaware that a smile had been on her face the entire time.

She carefully placed the bamboo dragonfly back on the bookshelf and went to the bed. Of course, she did not sit down, just looked it over.

The bedding had been folded very neatly and was exceptionally clean. Not even the smallest stain could be seen on the bedsheets or the pillow case. There wasn't even a hair, no...what was that?

In the shadow of the pillowcase was a very hard-to-see strand of hair.

Xu Yourong fell silent.

This hair was long and thin. It was clearly a woman's.

Suddenly, she felt a little cold.

After a while, she realized that the window was open.

It was snowing tonight. Snowflakes were drifting in from the window and wetting a corner of the desk.

She was rather puzzled. Given that Chen Changsheng was cool-headed, steady, and also a clean freak, why would he not close the window before he left?

Even if the snow could be disregarded, what if dust or leaves came in?

This window that wasn't closed—could it have been for someone?

Xu Yourong suddenly awoke from her trance.

These suspicions, these endless calculations, were not being used in battle or in cultivation, but instead to explore the truths of this strand of hair. Just when had she become this sort of person?

She shook her head and headed towards the wardrobe. Opening the wardrobe, she intended to take out a towel and wipe up the

snow that had fallen on the desk.

However, what happened next made her understand that her suspicions and resentment were not because she had become unbearable, but because that guy had always been very unbearable.

With a flutter of snowflakes, a waft of faint fragrance, a woman leaped through the window and landed in the room.

Simultaneously, a few words fell in Xu Yourong's ear.

"Don't blame this older sister for not telling you, your fiancée bears an extreme resentment towards you. You have to be careful, when her little temper gets up, tsk, tsk. In fact, you absolutely must not tell her that I often come here to sleep, or else..."

Suddenly, her teasing voice came to an abrupt halt.

Because she suddenly realized that the person behind the wardrobe door was not Chen Changsheng.

Xu Yourong closed the wardrobe and stared at the woman. She felt what her master had said was correct: in the mortal world, the most unbearable thing was talking. Whenever one said anything, things would often develop in accordance with what one said.

For example, as she was leaving the Divine General's estate, Shuang'er had asked her what she was going to do. She had lied and said she was going to see Mo Yu. Thus, now...she was seeing



Mo Yu.

But this was not the Imperial Palace, nor was it the Orange Garden that Mo Yu lived in. Instead, it was a room on the third floor of this house in the Orthodox Academy.

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Mo Yu's mouth fell open and for a long time, she couldn't speak. Then, she gave an unnatural laugh. Her voice a little hoarse, she asked, "Can you act like you didn't see me?"

Xu Yourong calmly looked at her. "I've already seen you."

Mo Yu used her right hand to rub her neck, her left hand to point at Xu Yourong. "Don't be in a rush to ask questions. Let me explain to you the current situation."

Xu Yourong calmly replied, "Take your time to think."

Mo Yu really was quite speechless, her mind in some disorder. She had originally planned to take advantage of Xu Yourong's return to the capital to tease Chen Changsheng and at the same time, give him a little warning. Who could have imagined that she would actually meet the primary subject in Chen Changsheng's room? And she even heard those words.

"First, we should reach a consensus that you should listen to my explanation with a cool head."

Mo Yu put down her hands and very solemnly explained, "The line about little temper was me speaking ill of you behind your back, but you absolutely cannot misunderstand the part about sleeping."

Xu Yourong smiled, "Continue."

Seeing her face, Mo Yu knew that she truly was angry. Sighing in her heart, she lifelessly continued, "Sleeping is just sleeping, not the sleeping that you're thinking of."

"Oh, what sort of sleeping is that?" Xu Yourong's smile grew even warmer.

Mo Yu helplessly said, "In any case, you absolutely cannot misunderstand."

Xu Yourong sized her up and observed the red nightgown she was wearing, her two bare feet, and the black hair draped over her shoulders, slightly damp and speckled with a few snowflakes, as if she had just come out of a bath?

"Hmmm, please tell me so that I won't misunderstand."

Mo Yu followed her gaze to her own body, and her heart seemed to give a thud. After Chen Changsheng had mentioned it, she really would take a bath each time before coming over. It had gradually become a habit, and tonight, she had naturally done the same before coming over...then, this was what was meant by not being able to wash oneself clean, even after jumping to the sea of stars.

There was a saying that after shattering a jar, one could gain the upper hand by a show of strength, and Mo Yu chose to do so. Although she could see that her explanations were to no avail, she seemed to become much more bold and confident. Looking at Xu Yourong, she declared, "This story is very long and I can't imagine that you're interested in it. But what about you? I'm really quite curious to hear your story. It's your first day after coming back to the capital, but instead of staying at home, why come here?"

Xu Yourong walked to the window. She didn't say anything, nor did she look at Mo Yu. The lights from beyond the school walls fell upon the snow and then reflected upon her face.

Mo Yu examined that face so beautiful that even she was somewhat envious, then with a fluid glance, continued her questioning, "The Holy Maiden's heart is concerned with mundane things?"

Xu Yourong glanced at her, then asked, "Back then when you wrote about the matter of him and the young Black Dragon...was it true or false?"

"Absolutely correct, at that time, he and she were embracing each other." Mo Yu saw an opportunity to divert the subject, so she

would not just let this chance pass her by. She was even willing to swear an oath on the Divine Empress's name, but she suddenly recalled what had happened a moment ago and said uncertainly, "But just like how you saw me come in and heard my words, what the eyes see is not necessarily the truth."

Xu Yourong said nothing, a pensive look on her face.

Mo Yu seemed to think of something and asked in disbelief, "Why are you asking this? You're not really interested in him, are you? No wonder the first thing you did after coming back was to see him."

"I have an engagement with him. For me to see him upon coming back to the capital is a very natural thing to do."

Xu Yourong was very calm. Only her hands tightly clasped behind her back showed that she was truthfully rather nervous.

Mo Yu did not expect her to so calmly admit it. A little surprised, she said, "When you wrote to me back, you definitely weren't talking about it this way! In order to break the engagement between the two of you, I paid no small price. To be clear, Chen Changsheng is currently no ordinary person. I offended the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, the future Pope! If you're telling me now that you really plan to get together with him, then I'm definitely not done with you!"

Xu Yourong looked at her slightly wet black hair and the red nightgown, then calmly said, "The price truly is not small, but he

shouldn't feel it to be an affront or offense, right?"

Mo Yu was powerless to refute this and indignantly replied, "Other people may know not, but you and I both clearly understand that the Pope has already annulled the engagement between the two of you! Even if there is a relationship between me and him, just what status do you have to worry about it?"

Xu Yourong lightly said, "You don't have to worry about it."

After a moment of silence, Mo Yu asked, "Just what are you thinking?"

Xu Yourong gently lowered her head and softly said, "You still don't have to worry about it."

Only those most familiar with her would know that under her seemingly calm appearance, she was actually very delicate.

Mo Yu sighed at her, "Just suffocate yourself to death."

Xu Yourong calmly asked, "Where did he go?"

Mo Yu perked her brows. "How should I know? You'd better not really misunderstand."

At this moment, the music coming from beyond the academy walls suddenly got louder. Mo Yu gazed over, and even the heavy

fall of snowflakes dancing in the wind could not block her powerful eyes. She could see that in a brightly lit restaurant, a dancing girl was just beginning her dance.

"Don't be angry, but it seems he's over there," she said as she glanced at Xu Yourong.

Xu Yourong looked over. Sure enough, at the very top floor of the restaurant, that guy was drinking wine. At his side were three or four young men, and there were even many women walking over, like butterflies amongst the flowers.

This really was giving into sensual pleasures.

She gazed at the restaurant, quietly thinking to herself. It was at this moment that the dancer on the stage suddenly seemed to misstep and fell into that guy's bosom...

For some reason, she found it somewhat difficult to maintain the tranquility of her Dao heart, and her chest began to rise and fall.

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"If Xu Yourong came back, she came back, but what are you scared of? And what are you worrying about? Don't let yourself be hindered by any sort of mental block. If you should fight, fight."

In the restaurant, Tang Thirty-Six held up a wine cup and hugged a young singing girl. Looking at Chen Changsheng, he said, "Men and women have always been equal. Just don't hold on to that common and trite view that you shouldn't hit women. You have to fight anyway."

As he spoke, the young singing girl at his chest raised her head up to look at him, her eyes brimming with adoration and happiness.

The singing girl at Chen Changsheng's side was somewhat resentful. It wasn't merely because Chen Changsheng had been far too well-behaved, not even bumping against her fingers, but also because the entire continent knew full well who the fiancée of this young Principal of the Orthodox Academy was. She was just a pleasure woman, so by no means did she wish to offend the Divine General of the East's estate and the Phoenix high above.

"I'm prepared to lose, do you think it's okay?"

Chen Changsheng abruptly asked.

With this statement, the entire audience became quiet.

# Chapter 509 - An Appointment In Seven Days

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"Of course not." Tang Thirty-Six looked him in the eyes. "You can lose to that person, the Orthodox Academy cannot. In the future, how will His Holiness be able to speak in front of the Empress? Don't forget, this isn't just your matter alone, but the entire Orthodoxy's matter."

These matters were known by the entire continent, so there was no need to keep it away from those singers and dancers. However, the atmosphere still couldn't help but become more stifling.

Tang Thirty-Six wished for Chen Changsheng's mood to improve. Putting on a smile, he said, "And it's not like you want to shake up the role of the husband? You didn't see how shocked these girls were when you said that you planned to lose."

On the side, Su Moyu shook his head. "These words are inappropriate. Whether or not His Holiness has annulled the engagement between the two of them, since Chen Changsheng is already determined to not continue with the marriage, there's no need to use the phrase 'shake up the role of the husband'. It involves the reputation of the Holy Maiden, so it is inappropriate."

Tang Thirty-Six dully replied, "It's just a joke. In the Orthodox Academy, there's just you two bookworms, that cold-blooded killer Zhexiu, and also that gluttonous fool Xuanyuan Po. I don't even have a person to chat with, truly pitiful."



Saying this, he snatched Chen Changsheng's cup from the table and poured out all the tea in exchange for a strong wine from the Western Pass.

Chen Changsheng waved his hand, "I already said that I don't drink wine."

Su Moyu commented, "The weather is cold and it's snowing. We should get back a little earlier."

Tang Thirty-Six felt very helpless. "I'm helping him lessen the pressure, okay?"

Today, the White Crane had descended by the lake, Xu Yourong had returned to the capital, and Chen Changsheng had been very taciturn, like there was some weight over his heart. He had especially held this feast in the night in the hopes that Chen Changsheng could vent a little of his pressure, but he had failed to imagine that after entering the restaurant, Chen Changsheng and Su Moyu would not even drink wine. They sat prim and proper, and while their clapping for the dances of the dancing girls was quite earnest, in no way did it seem like they had come out to have fun...

Watching the dancing girl whirling around on the stage, he suddenly grinned. This grin contained an indescribable confidence and charm, causing the singing girl in his bosom to adore him even more. As he grinned, one of his fingers bent and a pine nut in a saucer on the table went flying away.

Noiselessly, the pine nut struck the dancer on the knee. The impact was not all that heavy but the position it struck was far too sensitive and one of the dancer's feet was not steady. As a result, she fell down into Chen Changsheng's bosom.

Chen Changsheng quickly held her up and asked in concern, "Are you okay?"

The dancer was also a person accustomed to matters of romance, experienced and knowledgeable. There was no way she didn't know what had happened. She first shot a resentful glare at Tang Thirty-Six before sending a gentle gaze towards Chen Changsheng. Her breath smelled like orchids as she whispered, "Your servant is somewhat unable to handle her alcohol."

As she spoke, her two arms very naturally draped themselves around Chen Changsheng's neck and she brought up her whole body against Chen Changsheng's chest.

With such soft jade-like skin by his chest, Chen Changsheng did not feel any sort of ecstasy, only strangeness and embarrassment.

Just as he was prepared to courteously help the dancing girl sit at his side, he suddenly felt like there was someone watching him through the snowy night from far away.

That gaze, that...gaze that might not even exist was not cold, but it produced an intense sense of unease in the depths of his heart. In the next moment, through purely subconscious, almost instinctual, action, he quickly raised his hands up.

He only wanted to indicate that he had no intention of overstepping his bounds with this dancing girl, and his two hands did not touch her body, but he did not expect just how comical his actions would appear in the eyes of others.

The restaurant was silent and then exploded with laughter, especially Tang Thirty-Six. He was laughing so hard that he was almost about to cry.

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Xu Yourong stood at the window, watching the scene in the restaurant. Even if her Dao heart was guarded even more closely or even more tranquil, she still couldn't help but raise her brows.

But in the next moment, when she saw Chen Changsheng raise his hands up high and heard the laughter coming from beyond the wall, she revealed a smile, and it was only through sheer effort that she did not laugh.

Mo Yu took in all the changes in her expression and said, "If you want to laugh, laugh, no need to choke it down."

Xu Yourong was still looking in the direction of the restaurant. Seeing Chen Changsheng's embarrassed appearance and hearing Mo Yu's words, she finally couldn't hold it back. Laughter came

out, "Hahahaha!"

Mo Yu was scared out of her wits by this laughter. Holding her chest, she asked, "Are you okay? Why is your laughter like an old aunt's..."

Xu Yourong's laughter was rather broad, or perhaps imposing? In brief, her laughter was not at all like a sixteen-year-old girl's. It was more like that of the auntie who sold youtiao and soy milk at the entrance to Hundred Flowers Lane. To be even more accurate, it was incredibly similar to the laugh of the auntie that she played mahjong with down in the village.

Xu Yourong was rather embarrassed and put up a calm front. "You see, he looks just like a fool."

Mo Yu had no attention to spare for looking at Chen Changsheng, it was quite enough to just gawk at her.

She clearly recalled that when she first met Xu Yourong, Xu Yourong was just five. At the time, she had still been a little girl, but she had always loved to just quietly sit, read and then cultivate. She was holy and tranquil, like a miniature Holy Maiden.

When had she ever seen her with such an appearance?

"You haven't...really fallen in love with that guy, right?"

Mo Yu was stunned and also concerned.

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The banquet in the restaurant was brought to a close after the bout of laughter. Chen Changsheng and the other two jumped over the academy wall and returned to the Orthodox Academy.

They had just walked into the house when the door to the room on the side opened. They looked over and realized in shock that Zhexiu was standing there.

"You're finally in the mood to walk a few steps today?" Tang Thirty-Six teased.

Zhexiu disregarded him, saying to Chen Changsheng, "She came."

"Who?" Chen Changsheng was rather puzzled.

"Xu Yourong."

Upon saying this name, Zhexiu closed the door. From his appearance, it seemed like he was preparing to go back to sleep.

The other three were all extremely shocked at this name. As they stared at the tightly-shut door, they all knew that they would find

it very difficult to sleep tonight.

Tang Thirty-Six walked back out to the front of the house and, with wrinkled brow, looked all around. He then turned to Chen Changsheng and said apologetically, "She might have seen the scene of us drinking wine. My apologies."

Chen Changsheng covered his face. "I said I didn't want to go, but you insisted on dragging me along."

Tang Thirty-Six felt rather depressed at his appearance and said, "You aren't planning to marry, and she might not want to marry you. What are you afraid of her for?"

Chen Changsheng came to his senses and thought, that's right! He felt that covering his face was a rather shameful action. Forcefully acting calm, he replied, "Right, even if I saw her, so what?"

Tang Thirty-Six sneered, "What are you acting so manly for? If you've got the capability, then put your hands on the girl's body."

"I'm obsessed with cleanliness." Chen Changsheng looked at him and Su Moyu and explained, "It's not that I suspect those girls are dirty, I'm just not mentally prepared to cross that mountain."

In a poor mood, Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Of course we know that. You don't suspect that those girls are dirty, you suspect that everyone is dirty."

Su Moyu had been very quiet this entire time. He suddenly asked, "Why did the Holy Maiden come to the Orthodox Academy?"

"Yeah." Tang Thirty-Six no longer kept up his teasing and asked Chen Changsheng seriously, "Could she be angry and so sneaked over to stab you to death?"

After a momentary pause, he sighed, "That would really be murdering your own husband."

He didn't seem to be teasing, but in reality, the ridicule was laid on even thicker.

Su Moyu seemed to be endowed with extraordinary intelligence, but in reality, he was rather slow. "As I just said, since the engagement is not valid, Chen Changsheng cannot regard the Holy Maiden as his fiancée. Even if she really did want to stab Chen Changsheng to death, it can't be considered murdering her husband. You could only say she attempted to kill someone."

In reality, Chen Changsheng had already requested for the Pope to forcefully annul that engagement, but for certain reasons, he had not made this fact publicly known.

Su Moyu looked at Tang Thirty-Six and advised with heartfelt sincerity, "Moreover, she's still the Holy Maiden. You should be more respectful towards her."

Tang Thirty-Six raised his brows. "Besides being stronger than me at fighting, I see no reason to respect her."

At this moment, Zhexiu's voice came through the door.

"I've always revered Xu Yourong, so all of you should also revere her."

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Matters developed far faster than imagined. On the morning of the next day, disciples from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green and South Stream Temple came to visit the Orthodox Academy.

Thinking about how Xu Yourong had come and could even have entered his own room, Chen Changsheng felt rather peculiar, so much so that he could barely get any sleep. When he appeared before the three disciples from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green and South Stream Temple, there were bags under his eyes and he seemed a little weak. When the senior sister from South Stream Temple recalled that row of restaurants she saw in front of the academy gate, she made certain conjectures. She could not help but look upon him with a hint of scorn.

Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu had once met this senior sister of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green in the Garden of Zhou and



they could be said to be acquainted. She rather awkwardly chuckled and, not engaging in any chitchat, straightforwardly handed the letter over.

Ever since the Orthodoxy had begun the All-School Martial Exhibition this summer, the Orthodox Academy had already received many such letters, but when Chen Changsheng took the letter, he still felt it rather heavy.

The letter was a commonly seen letter of challenge, but the person was very special. It was Xu Yourong.

The battle that the entire continent had anticipated for many months had simply and straightforwardly come.

Chen Changsheng opened the letter and looked it over. From the brush strokes, he concluded that Xu Yourong had not written it. There was nothing special about the contents. The most salient points were the date and location.

The date was seven days from now.

The location was the Bridge of Helplessness.

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# Chapter 510 - Her

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For some inexplicable reason, whenever Chen Changsheng thought about how the first thing Xu Yourong did upon returning to the capital was challenging the Orthodox Academy, not even tarrying a single day, he felt rather depressed.

Once the three disciples from the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green and South Stream Temple saw that he received the letter, they bid him farewell.

It was rumored that Chen Changsheng had requested for the Pope to forcefully annul the engagement. Although no proof had yet surfaced, Chen Changsheng had never denied it either.

To South Stream Temple, this was without question an enormous disgrace, so that senior sister had never showed a good expression towards Chen Changsheng, even when he was now the Principal of the Orthodox Academy. On the contrary, that somewhat younger junior sister showed no enmity towards Chen Changsheng. Before she left, she even nodded her head at Chen Changsheng, as if there was something she wanted to say.

"That girl is a little weird," Tang Thirty-Six commented.

Chen Changsheng first put away the letter, then asked, "A rather clean girl, what's so strange about her?"

With a solemn expression, Tang Thirty-Six answered, "From beginning to end, that girl never even glanced in my direction. She

just stared at you."

"She's called Ye Xiaolian. She should have entered South Stream Temple's outer sect just this year."

Chen Changsheng admonished, "Last year on the Divine Avenue of the Li Palace, you scolded her until she cried in front of so many people. It's only natural that she not have a good impression of you."

Tang Thirty-Six finally realized just who that girl called Ye Xiaolian was. Shaking his head, he argued, "So what? The more this is the case, the deeper the impression I should have left her. As they say, hate begets love..."

Chen Changsheng could no longer keep listening. Turning around, he walked back to the house.

Tang Thirty-Six followed behind. Rather discontent, he continued, "In addition, just why did I scold her back then? Wasn't it because I wanted to help you vent your anger? In the end, just what was going on over there? She didn't look at me, but at you. With that enraptured appearance, how can it not be weird?"

Chen Changsheng did not turn his head as he replied, "Let's not talk about this. Help me think of ideas on what to do next."

"Didn't we already discuss it last night? Just fight."

Tang Thirty-Six quickened his steps and pulled up beside Chen Changsheng. Turning his head to look at him, he asked worriedly, "You aren't really thinking about conceding, right?"

Chen Changsheng contemplated the question, then shook his head.

Tang Thirty-Six warned, "Seven days from now at the Bridge of Helplessness, you'd better not decide to concede because you think she's beautiful...although I know how difficult that is, but with how you didn't seem to understand what flirting was last night, there's still a possibility."

Chen Changsheng was rather confused. Why was it that everyone, from Xu Shiji to Tang Thirty-Six, was all so sure that he would change his mind upon seeing Xu Yourong?

He had put this question to Tang Thirty-Six before. Back then, Tang Thirty-Six had given a very simple answer, but he seemed a bit more serious today.

"I've never met Xu Yourong, but I've met many people who've delayed their marriages after seeing Xu Yourong."

He looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "Just like your Stainless Sword, as long as it's sharp enough, sharp to the point of perfection, then it can enter the Tier of Legendary Weapons. One person, whether male or female, if they are beautiful enough, beautiful to the point of perfection, is very frightening. In the past, there was Zhou Yuren and the young Divine Empress, and now

there's Xu Yourong. They're all this sort of person."

Chen Changsheng found it impossible to understand this sort of statement.

Tang Thirty-Six explained, "Just like a painting, a vase of plum blossoms, a lake of limpid water, a distant mountain...if someone wanted to destroy these, even you would feel it a sin."

Chen Changsheng recalled all the sights and people he had encountered on his journey from Xining to the capital and then to Hanqiu City, the Plains of the Unsetting Sun and the dark rains over Xunyang City, the young maiden of the plains and Wang Po in the rain, and he roughly understood.

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This battle which had captivated the eyes of tens of thousands would begin in seven days. Even the waters flowing under the Bridge of Helplessness seemed to flow faster upon hearing this news.

The quickest to respond were still the Four Great Markets. This single match had far too great of an influence. Many powerful figures would definitely wish to see it personally. Perhaps even the Divine Empress and the Pope might be present. The streets on both the east and west sides of the Bridge of Helplessness began to be

cleaned. It could be presumed that on the day of the match, the Imperial Court and the Li Palace would occupy their respective sides, leaving no space for the Four Great Markets to construct any sort of awning. However, the Four Great Markets would absolutely not miss out on betting for this battle.

There was still seven days of time before the formal opening of this battle, but it already had a formal name: The Battle of the Bridge of Helplessness.

It even seemed like everyone thought it a done deal that this battle would go down in the annals of history.

This had nothing to do with the cultivation levels of Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng. The two could possess an even more inconceivable talent, they could be considered the two youngest upper level Ethereal Opening cultivators in history, but they were still just sixteen years old.

Without even bringing up the battle between Zhou Dufu and Emperor Taizong in Luoyang, this battle didn't even match up to the battle in the dark rain that had occurred not too long ago in Xunyang City.

But the two sides of this battle were Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng, and this was enough.

They didn't need their identities as the Holy Maiden of the south and the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, nor did they need the engagement, and that conflict between the Tianhai clan and the Li

Palace didn't even need to be discussed. None of this had ever been forgotten, because as soon as those two names were mentioned, all these events of the past year would surface again in the minds of the people, and the entire world would become excited.

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Everyone in the capital was awaiting the coming of this battle. Many people in the Imperial Court and the Li Palace were making their preparations for it.

As one of the participants, Chen Changsheng naturally had his own preparations to make. He had already fought with many Star Condensation cultivators, even faced off against the likes of Liang Wangsun and Painted Armor Xiao Zhang, but even though his opponent Xu Yourong was only at the upper level of Ethereal Opening, he would definitely not treat her with the slightest scorn or disregard. He was very sure that Xu Yourong was far stronger than those initial level Star Condensation cultivators that had lost at his hand.

If he wished to emerge victorious against a genius like Xu Yourong, to obtain victory in the face of the bloodline of the true Phoenix, he naturally had to prepare his most powerful techniques.

The moment the match's date was decided, he launched his first sword, the Intellectual Sword—with the assistance of the Li Palace

and Wenshui Tangs, he obtained countless files and dossiers pertaining to Xu Yourong. Sitting by the window, he began to seriously study them, attempting to find the information he required from within. With enough information, he could calculate and deduce just how he should use this sword of his.

He first comprehended the techniques of South Stream Temple, the history of Holy Maiden Peak, how the Daoist techniques of north and south began to diverge after the schism of the Orthodoxy, and the fruits of the Holy Maidens' research into the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. For this purpose, the Li Palace had sent over countless books, even a notebook that Xu Yourong had written in the past two years of her study of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. Then, he began to comprehend the Divine General of the East's estate, what sort of style Xu Shiji usually led his troops with, Madam Xu's temperament, what sort of life that maid called Shuang'er lived before entered the Xu Estate and also how she had been brought in by Xu Yourong. After he had comprehended and grasped all this information, he could finally begin the most important part: Xu Yourong herself.

There was an enormous amount of information concerning Xu Yourong. Besides the Li Palace, the Wenshui Tangs had also sent over two boxes. However, if all the commonly known information and those examples of battles were excluded, there was actually very little useful information in all of this. Moreover, the vast majority of the information was rumors from when she lived in the capital. There were not many records from her time in Holy Maiden Peak.

The more Chen Changsheng studied those files, the more impossible it was for him to understand Xu Yourong.



This wasn't to say that Xu Yourong was a very enigmatic girl.

In reality, when she was very small, many common folk of the capital had seen her with their own eyes.

They had seen her leap from the stone bridge into the canal. After rescuing her, they had asked why she had jumped. She said that it was because there was a moon in the water.

They had seen her going for a walk at New North Bridge and jumping towards that abandoned well. After barely managing to obstruct her, they had asked why. She said that it was because there was a dragon in that well.

There were many old people that even now had not forgotten a scene that used to take place very often some ten years ago in front of the Li Palace.

It was still the little girl Xu Yourong who would often climb up the stone pillars of the Li Palace to watch the sun, laughing very happily. Below, the Li Palace priests were both anxious and angry, yet didn't dare to do anything. Even their shouts for her to come down were warm and gentle.

She, who from the moment she was born had been determined by the Divine Empress and the Pope to hold the blood of the true Phoenix, was the cherished treasure of the entire capital and all of the Great Zhou. Let alone the hallowed pillars of the Li Palace, even the Princess of Ping who was several years older than her was

often beaten black and blue. The Divine Empress did not care, so these Li Palace priests were powerless.

In brief, Xu Yourong in her childhood was a naughty and mischievous young monkey, a daring tomboy. No one could have imagined what she would become.

At the age of five, Xu Yourong's true Phoenix blood awakened.

This was two years earlier than calculated by the Divine Empress and the Pope.

From that day onward, Xu Yourong seemed to transform into another person entirely. Her white dress was no longer stained with dust, remaining beautiful and serene.

Her temperament also became beautiful and serene. No matter what situation she encountered, she remained calm and indifferent.

She no longer uttered nonsense like the canal containing a moon or the well holding a dragon, and she no longer messed around.

She began to quietly study, calmly cultivate, and she was still so small.

At that time, the common folk of the capital would occasionally see her entering the palace, and it almost seemed like they had seen a real fairy.

The capital's burning adoration and worship most likely began from that point.

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Reading these files and imagining those scenes, Chen Changsheng entered a sort of trance.

As it turned out, when she was small, she had been that sort of person.

But why was it that when they were exchanging letters, he had never felt any of this? And why hadn't he felt any of the other her that was so admired by the common folk of the capital?

Gazing at the bamboo dragonfly on the bookshelf, he found himself rather perplexed.

Too many things had happened after he came to the capital, making it impossible for him to preserve any sort of favorable impression towards Xu Yourong. Those fancies that he presumably once had also vanished into nothingness. Furthermore, they were opponents. But even with all this, he was forced to admit that Xu Yourong truly was extraordinary. The moon in the canal, he could not understand, but he knew more than anyone else that under the abandoned well in New North Bridge...there really was a dragon.

And she knew this when she wasn't yet five?

# Chapter 511 - The Compass Of Fate

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At the age of five, Xu Yourong's blood awakened and she began to cultivate. She seemed to randomly pick out a star to be her Fated Star, but the brightness of that star could be ranked in the top three within the past century. After a few years, she concluded her studies at the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green. The Holy Maiden of the south personally came to the capital and took her from the hands of the Divine Empress and the Pope to South Stream Temple.

At South Stream Temple, her cultivation level remained in Meditation, but she had already begun to study the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. Moreover, one could see from those notebooks that she really had comprehended them.

He and she were the youngest upper level Ethereal Opening cultivators in history, but he had relied on lucky encounters and the true blood of the Black Dragon, while she had relied completely on her innate talent and perception.

She and Qiushan Jun were alike in that neither had encountered any sort of obstacle on their path of cultivation. As long as they wished to learn it, they would learn it.

In terms of quantity of true essence, strength of spiritual sense, or Daoist techniques, she far surpassed her peers.

She was the true Phoenix.

Chen Changsheng was quiet for a very long time. With regards to the battle seven days from now, he had no confidence whatsoever.

At present, there were many people who said he was a cultivating genius, especially with regards to the path of the sword, but only after reviewing Xu Yourong's life did he understand what being a genius truly meant.

Precisely as Tang Thirty-Six had said last year in the Plum Garden Inn, Xu Yourong was a person that made others speechless.

However, also precisely as Tang Thirty-Six had said, this battle had to be fought. He represented the Orthodox Academy and the Li Palace. Even if they weren't enemies, even if he didn't want to fight, they would still have to fight before talking about other things.

He stood up and walked over to the wardrobe, intending to take out a new towel and wash his face.

He was a person that lived a very simple life. Only in this aspect did he indulge himself. Whenever some major event occurred, he would always wash himself spotless and he would also choose to use a brand-new towel.

Upon opening the wardrobe, he was stunned on the spot: one of his towels was missing.

Several dozen towels were neatly stacked and folded. Besides

him, there was probably no one else that would notice one was missing.

That night, Xu Yourong had taken one of the towels and wiped the snow off the desk.

He quietly stood in front of the wardrobe, standing there for a very long time.

For whatever reason, he ultimately did not take out a towel. He slowly closed the wardrobe door and walked back to the window, gazing at the nearby Imperial Palace.

Right now, she should be at the Imperial Palace, right?

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The Imperial Palace of the Great Zhou had many palace halls, but only the elderly ones within the palace still remembered that one of these palace halls was left for Xu Yourong's personal use.

This palace's location was rather remote, very quiet and beautiful. Moreover, it possessed an exceptionally fine garden and the scenery outside the window was sublime.

This was a matter the Divine Empress had decided on ten-odd

years ago. Later on, when Xu Yourong went to Holy Maiden Peak, the Princess of Ping wanted to move into this palace, but she was denied.

At this moment, Xu Yourong was sitting by the window. On the other side of the window, snowflakes were gently drifting down and the tree branches were speckled with snow, but she was in no mood for taking in the scenery.

Her gaze rested upon the Fate Compass in front of her.

Her fingers were softly gliding over the Fate Compass. As they moved, the complex lines and patterns on the Fate Compass moved with them. Like flowing water, they congregated and dispersed, as unfathomable as the drifting clouds. There were even times when they seemed just like the Heavenly Tomes.

Those lines which traveled along with different orbits represented countless factors, down to this very moment. They represented the history of the Orthodoxy, the inheritance of the Li Palace, the Orthodox Academy's past, Shang Xingzhou, the Pope, Su Li, that rumored senior brother, Tang Thirty-Six, Clear Lake Restaurant, and countless pieces of information regarding Chen Changsheng. Those sword styles which Chen Changsheng was most skilled at would naturally not be missed out.

As the night gradually deepened, she continued to calmly stare at the Fate Compass, performing her deductions and calculations.

Finally, after a very long time had passed, the snow came to a



stop, the clouds scattered, and the starlight fell on the snow covering the ground of the Imperial Palace. The starlight reflected into the room and fell upon the Fate Compass.

She stood up, clasped her hands behind her back, and proceeded out of the palace hall.

The Fate Compass was still quietly sitting on the ground. Under the illumination of the stars, those lines and patterns gradually ground to a halt.

It was a star chart.

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Events of this nature repeated themselves in the Orthodox Academy and the Imperial Palace for six whole days.

Papers were piled high at Chen Changsheng's side, sentences and numbers written all over them. He had even been too busy to take a bath. He was still incessantly calculating, exhausted, but growing ever more confident.

Xu Yourong was also incessantly using her Fate Compass to perform calculations and deductions. Ultimately, she obtained seventeen star charts. As expected, each one of these star charts pointed towards victory.

As the atmosphere in the capital grew increasingly excited, the atmosphere of the Imperial Palace and Orthodox Academy grew increasingly tense.

This was because many people had seen how much time Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong had taken to prepare for this battle—how much effort, mental and physical, they had put into it.

After six days was the seventh day. The seventh day was the day on which the battle would begin.

Not long after early morning, all the other places of the capital grew quiet as countless people made their way to the Luo River.

The location of Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong's match was the Bridge of Helplessness, over the Luo River. Everyone judged this to be the most fitting battlefield.

It wasn't because the Bridge of Helplessness was famed for its scenery, a fitting spot for the battle destined to be recorded in the annals of history. Instead, it was because of the Bridge of Helplessness's location.

To the west of the Bridge of Helplessness was the Li Palace, to the east was the Imperial Palace, and it was equidistant from both palaces.

The choice of this location definitely had some deeper meaning,

and it was also fair.

Xu Yourong had stayed in the Imperial Palace the entire time. In a short while, she would most likely come out of the Imperial Palace. However, Chen Changsheng did not leave from the Li Palace, but from the Orthodox Academy. Just as he normally did, he woke up at five o'clock, steadied his mind for a moment, then opened his eyes. Under the earnest gaze of Xuanyuan Po, he ate two big bowls of beef noodle soup. With the assistance of Su Moyu, he put on the uniform of the Orthodox Academy. Whether it was how much of the collar was exposed, how the clothes were arranged, or the difference in the heights of the shoes, all of it was perfectly brought into line with the strictest of standards.

Tang Thirty-Six did nothing. He just sat on the side, picking at his teeth with a toothpick, at the same time grumbling nonstop about how today's braised beef was not tender enough.

The gate of the Orthodox Academy slowly opened. Accompanied by Tang Thirty-Six and the rest as well as the new students, Chen Changsheng walked through Hundred Flowers Lane and arrived on the main street. Then, under the attention of countless eyes, he began walking towards the Luo River.

At some point, a bowl of soy milk and two youtiao had appeared in Tang Thirty-Six's hands.

When Priest Xin noticed this upon reaching the main street, he helplessly shook his head, "At such a tense moment, you actually didn't forget about this matter."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "What's there to be nervous about? In any case, it's just determining winner and loser, not life and death. That's not even mentioning the fact that good food is always above life and death."

For some reason, Chen Changsheng's mood became much calmer upon hearing these words.

But today, the entire capital was bound to find it impossible to remain calm.

The news that Chen Changsheng had departed the Orthodox Academy was carried along with the chilly north wind to every corner of the capital.

"Chen Changsheng exited Hundred Flowers Lane."

"All the students of the Orthodox Academy are following him."

"The people from the Li Palace have already caught up with him."

"They've already reached the Ink Pond."

"They've passed Tiantong Park."

"Chen Changsheng is about to reach the Monastery of the Returning Dragon."

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# Chapter 512 - The Sights Of The Bridge Of Helplessness

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The alley of the Northern Military Department was deathly still. The two crabapple trees in the courtyard had long since shed all their flowers, but in the past two days, they had accumulated some snow, making it seem like a sea of flowers had been reborn.

Zhou Tong stood under the crabapple trees, looking at the kneeling subordinate giving his report. Rather annoyed, he asked, "Do I even need to be especially informed of such trivial matters?"

The subordinate was quite perplexed, thinking, the match between Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng is, without doubt, the final major event of the year. Why is Your Excellency so completely indifferent to it?

"Since life or death is not decided there, it's a trivial matter."

Zhou Tong shared the exact same opinion as Tang Thirty-Six. Saying this, he turned and headed back to his room, no longer concerning himself with this matter.

Zhou Tong paid no attention to this battle, but there were still many people keeping close attention on it.

By a quiet and beautiful snowy lake to the north of the city, Tianhai Chenwu was leaning against a balcony, viewing the snow. For some reason, he suddenly recalled the lake by Clear Lake

Restaurant and his mood took a turn for the worse.

In the past few days, whenever he spoke to Xu Shiji, he spoke with far more courtesy. This was because Xu Yourong had become the Holy Maiden far earlier than anyone had imagined.

But perhaps because of his rather sour mood, or perhaps because he was nervous, his attitude towards Xu Shiji returned to what it had been in the past, even far more unyielding and straightforward.

"You want to rely on the Li Palace, you also have to see if the other side lets you rely on it. The Pope directly annulled the engagement and the Divine General's estate was once more ridiculed by the common people. Just what benefit did that give you?"

Tianhai Chenwu continued, "Since this battle still has to be fought in the end, what need was there to have pursued those fool's errands?"

Xu Shiji was silent, his face emotionless. In reality, he was already furious to the extreme.

Tianhai Chenwu smiled, "Today, let's see if Yourong can help her father give vent to his anger."

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The population of the Orthodox Academy was not great. All together, they only numbered a hundred-odd people.

But when all of them walked together on the street, their manner was quite astonishing. This was especially the case later on when they were followed by several thousand people of the capital down the street. Their momentum seemed even greater and they presented a rather stunning sight.

Not too far past the Monastery of the Returning Dragon was the Luo River, which was also called the Luo Canal. Not far ahead, one could already see that famous bridge.

But not everyone could go over. Besides Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six and all the other students that followed him were barred at the corner of Eight Willows Street.

From Eight Willows Street to Four Way Street, a perimeter several li around the Bridge of Helplessness had already been made.

As they could not get in, the spectating populace could only stand on the two shores of the Luo River. At the moment, there were already many people, a dense mass of people lining the shores far into the distance such that the end could not be seen.

They were all discussing the match that was about to begin,



analyzing who was stronger and who would win.

Chen Changsheng was a different person than he was this time last year. At the Ivy Festival, he had engaged in a battle on the comprehension of swords with Gou Hanshi. In the Grand Examination, he had inconceivably obtained first rank of the first banner. In the Mausoleum of Books, he had brought starlight down over the entire capital and been compared by many people to Wang Zhice. Without even mentioning the events of the Garden of Zhou and the battles on his journey back south, and discussing only the time period between the start of the summer and now, the Orthodox Academy had confronted innumerable challenges, and Chen Changsheng had not lost once. Even more shocking was that he had won six consecutive victories over experts of the initial level of Star Condensation. It was only at this point that the people realized that the seemingly inconceivable feat of surpassing cultivation levels was actually no surprise for him, but something right and inevitable.

From the stupefaction at the beginning to the 'right and inevitable' of now, even a little numbness, Chen Changsheng had given this world far too many shocks.

There was even less to discuss about the other side. Xu Yourong had always been special. She of the true Phoenix blood was identical to Qiushan Jun. From the moment they began to cultivate, they exceeded the bounds of an ordinary person's imagination, and they had even managed to surpass the limits of their peers. She did not need to attend the Grand Examination, as she was qualified to enter the Mausoleum of Books whenever she wished. In truth, at the age of ten, she had already begun to study the Heavenly Tomes. Up until now, no one knew if she had ever

fought experts at the initial level of Star Condensation, but many people, including Chen Changsheng, believed without a doubt that she could easily accomplish this feat traditionally regarded as most arduous.

If it was said that Chen Changsheng had given the world far too many shocks this year, then Xu Yourong could be said to have always been the world's most pleasantly surprising discovery.

"They've come!"

The people on the banks of the Luo River realized that Chen Changsheng and all the people of the Orthodox Academy had arrived and began to cry out. The scene became very noisy and lively.

Some of the crowd reverentially bowed and asked if he was well, some of them yelled out questions. But there were no cheers, and in the countless cries, nobody said 'you must win!'...

"The Four Great Markets sent news. Besides the Orthodox Academy and the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education, there's basically no one who placed bets on you winning...even many of the priests of the Li Palace bet on Xu Yourong."

Tang Thirty-Six consoled, "But you can understand it as the popular sentiment of the capital, not at all a judgment of your strength."

Chen Changsheng thought, even it really is this way, it's not too much of a comfort.

He asked Tang Thirty-Six, "And you?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "I have faith in you."

This was not a blind faith, and it didn't have anything to do with the bond between friends either. Rather, this was a statement made on the basis of sober acknowledgment.

Tang Thirty-Six was keenly aware how serious and arduous were the preparations Chen Changsheng had made in these seven days, watching every day as Chen Changsheng calculated and deduced in his room. He even felt that there was no one else in the world as serious as Chen Changsheng. This was what was meant by the saying, 'the heavens reward the diligent'. As long as the stars above still shone bright, there was no basis for as serious a person as Chen Changsheng to lose.

"I advise you to still bet on me to lose."

Chen Changsheng patted him on the shoulder, then, under the guidance of a priest, headed into Eight Willows Street.

Watching his back, Tang Thirty-Six wanted to say something but ultimately decided not to. He vaguely felt that those final words were indicating something.

Seeing his expression, Xuanyuan Po was rather solemn. Puzzled, he asked, "You just said a moment ago that since life or death isn't being decided, it didn't matter that much, so why are you beginning to worry now?"

"I'm not worried about whether or not he might lose, I'm worried about my money." Tang Thirty-Six turned and walked into the crowd.

Xuanyuan Po became even more confused. He shouted, "What are you going to do?"

Without turning his head, Tang Thirty-Six answered, "I'm going to the Four Great Markets to cancel my bet."

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Eight Willows Street was very quiet. Besides the priest guiding him, there was no one else on the street.

But upon reaching the side lane of Eight Willows Street that led to the Luo River, the priest stopped and extended his hand, inviting Chen Changsheng to enter.

Chen Changsheng nodded his head and walked into the side lane. In a short while, he reached the edge of the Luo River. He just needed to walk up the steps and he would arrive at the lower end

of the Bridge of Helplessness.

The Bridge of Helplessness was the greatest bridge over the Luo River. The bridge was incredibly broad—ten-odd carriages could run across it side by side. The bridge was very tall, but it wasn't very steep. Compared to other bridges, it was actually very flat. When standing at the base of bridge and looking across, one would think of the bridge as a plaza.

Chen Changsheng walked up the bridge. It didn't take long before he arrived at the very center of the bridge.

There was no one on the Bridge of Helplessness, nor was there anyone on the other side. There was no one as far as the eye could see. It was spacious and quiet.

He stood on the bridge, watching the river flow under it, and then remembered something.

A bridge pier of the Bridge of Helplessness had been struck two years ago by a boat. The Imperial Court had expended a vast sum of money in order to set up an array to make the bridge firm.

This array was right below the bridge.

Similarly, the important water gates along the Luo River also had arrays which prevented the water from freezing in the bitter winter. The grain boats and merchant ships from the south could travel unhindered. However, the capital today was under martial

law, especially in the area around the Bridge of Helplessness. The Luo River, which on a normal day would provide the grand sight of endless boats traveling along it, was today very cold and cheerless.

Just like this bridge.

Not one person, not one boat.

Just as he was musing on this, he saw a great ship coming from downstream.

This boat was massive, most likely a warship of the Great Zhou Navy. The uppermost deck was almost level with the Bridge of Helplessness.

Many people stood on the deck of the great ship, but there were fewer people standing on the very top deck, many of which he knew.

With a light splash, the great ship slowly came to a stop and dropped its anchor. It was still about a li away from the Bridge of Helplessness.

Chen Changsheng could clearly see that standing on the uppermost deck of the ship were several Divine Generals clad in armor. He recognized Xue Xingchuan, Fei Dian...Xue He had unexpectedly also returned. Of course, there was also Xu Shiji. Also present were the directors of the Ivy Academies, with the current Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy, Zhuang Zhihuan,

standing at the center of them. Standing at a more forward position were the important figures of the Imperial Court and the Orthodoxy. He saw Mao Qiuyu, Linghai Zhiwang, and Daoist Siyuan. He also saw the Minister of Rites as well as Mo Yu and Prince Chen Liu.

But these important figures were still not the people at the very front.

Standing at the very front of the ship were three painters from the Pavilion of Divination. One of them was the painter that had spectated Chen Changsheng's first match with Zhou Ziheng, while the other two were painters that the Pavilion of Divination had rushed over. All of them were Star Condensation cultivators. Back in Xunyang City, people found it inconceivable when they realized that the assassin Liu Qing was an upper level Star Condensation cultivator. Then three Star Condensation painters...

Chen Changsheng looked at the people on the ship.

The people on the ship looked at him on the bridge.

Daoist Siyuan said, "Even though I've always felt that they were just making trouble, he's still the Principal of the Orthodox Academy. I can only hope that in a little while, when he loses, it won't be in too unsightly a fashion."

On the side, Mao Qiuyu calmly replied, "To already speak of victory and defeat before it's even begun is too early."

Linghai Zhiwang expressionlessly declared, "Victory and defeat have already been decided."

In the eyes of these peak Star Condensation experts only a step away from the Divine Domain, slightest detail before or within battle was enough to affect the final outcome.

Linghai Zhiwang believed that since Chen Changsheng had come first, his defeat was inevitable. There was still some time before the appointed start. For him to come so early perhaps indicated that his mind was not calm enough. Furthermore, being the sole person standing on the Bridge of Helplessness, if he wanted to steady his mind, he would find it very challenging to do.

Because he had to wait, and waiting indicated passivity. These moments of time on the bridge required thoughts to fill them, and thinking too much had never been a good thing before a great battle.

"It's not necessarily good, and it's not necessarily bad either."

Mao Qiuyu gazed in the direction of the Bridge of Helplessness and opined, "Perhaps flighty and impetuous, perhaps calm and serene and coming early to get used to the environment. In the end, it all depends on the person's temperament."

This was a very reasonable statement.

In truth, each person had their own reasons. It was just that



because their standpoints and tendencies were different, the reasons they supported and the words they spoke would naturally be in conflict. Similarly, one could see from the reasons they supported and the words they spoke just where each of the people present actually stood.

"I don't understand cultivation, but from Principal Chen's actions in the past, there's really no need to doubt that he's calm and patient."

The one speaking was the Minister of Rites.

Many people shot glances of shock at him. Even Prince Chen Liu shot this high official a sideways glance. It was only at this point that everyone present realized that the Minister of Rites was actually favorable towards the old Imperial clan!

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In the Orthodox Academy, Zhexiu looked out his window at the ashen sky. After a long silence, he finally stood up, took up the walking stick leaning on the wall, and walked out.

Just as he walked out of the house, he suddenly felt a slight chill on his body. He extended his hand to feel it and discovered that it was snow on the verge of melting.

He raised his head up to the sky and realized that it was beginning to snow.

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"It's snowing," someone on the ship said.

The snowflakes fluttering down caused the people on the ship to show a little movement and then once more settle into an eerie silence.

As the crowd watched Chen Changsheng on the bridge, they thought, if the snow gets worse, it will disturb his mindset.

Seeing this snow, would Xu Yourong come earlier, or deliberately come later?

The flakes of snow gradually transformed into pieces of snow.

It didn't take long for Chen Changsheng's body to be speckled in white.

The populace on both shores of the Luo River began to raise up umbrellas. Several tens of thousands of umbrellas simultaneously opened, creating a rather spectacular sight.

Chen Changsheng could not see this scene. He could only see the snow falling before his eyes.

He had already stood on the bridge for a very long time, but precisely as Linghai Zhiwang had judged, he found it impossible to completely settle his heart.

Because he was currently very nervous.

To be more precise, he had always been very nervous.

From the moment the White Crane landed on the shore of the Orthodox Academy's lake, he began to feel nervous. He had been nervous all this time, all the way up until now.

He was not used to this feeling of nervousness. He was aware that this sort of feeling was not good for his health and would have an even greater effect on his fighting performance.

As a result, he gradually became somewhat anxious.

The source of this nervousness and anxiety was naturally this battle, but it was primarily because his opponent in this battle was her.

Far too many things had happened after he had come to the capital from Xining Village, and the source of all of it was her. And now, he was finally going to meet her.

In the previous few days, besides calculating and deducting, he inevitably also began to think about just what he should say in their first true meeting.

He had not been able to think of what to say.

Since he couldn't think of it, he wouldn't think about it anymore.

At this moment, he finally made a decision.

He would no longer look at the people on the ship and on the bridge. Those were all worldly things, far too complex.

He would also no longer look at the snow falling from the sky. Snow moved without pattern, too unpredictably.

He looked at the water under the bridge.

The Luo River in the deep winter was calm, but under the surface, the water continued to flow.

In this channel of water, the moving and unmoving had achieved unity. This was to act as one.

As he gazed below the bridge, he handed over all his thoughts to the flowing waters. He gradually calmed down until he forgot all things and almost entered a state of emptiness.

Then, Xu Yourong arrived.

She walked over from the long street on the other end of the bridge. She seemed to come with the snow, noiselessly and without movement.

The falling snow was a very natural occurrence, and her arrival was also a very natural occurrence. Without disturbing a single person, she arrived at the base of the Bridge of Helplessness.

At this moment, Chen Changsheng was on the bridge, seeing the sight of flowing water.

She was looking at the person on the bridge that was taking in the sights.

The White Crane flew in from some far-off place, snow dancing around it. It landed on the black eaves of some house behind the bridge.

All of this made for a very beautiful sight.

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# Chapter 513 - All Things Indescribable

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The crane's cry resounded through the snowstorm and spread to both banks of the Luo River.

People in the crowd began to stand up. Voices could be heard everywhere and some people stood on tiptoes, wanting to get a better view of the activity on the bridge. Some people decided to just climb up to the branches of the scholar trees on the riverside. However, trees in winter are somewhat brittle—how could they bear the burden of so many people? With a cracking sound, ten-odd scholar trees successively snapped and several dozen people were dumped into the cold river. Today, there were many Li Palace priests and Zhou soldiers keeping watch, and there were also boats at ready downstream. It didn't take long for those people to be rescued from the river. No lives were endangered, but with the sudden shock of bone-chilling river water, a bout of illness was almost inevitable.

The match on the Bridge of Helplessness had not yet begun and many people hadn't even caught sight of Xu Yourong's figure yet, but the surroundings were already a mess of disorder. From this, one could gather just how much this battle was anticipated.

The great ship was somewhat closer to the Bridge of Helplessness. The important figures on the ship had already seen that figure at the foot of the bridge. After a momentary restlessness, they grew quiet once more.

At this time, Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu somehow boarded the boat. After meeting up with Su Moyu, they began to search for a

place to view the match. The head of the boat was filled with important figures and seniors. No matter how wanton he was, even Tang Thirty-Six found it inappropriate to cause trouble at this sort of time. After looking around, he suddenly revealed a cheerful expression. Leading the other two, he squeezed next to Mo Yu. Mo Yu glanced at him but didn't say anything.

Tang Thirty-Six looked over at the distant Bridge of Helplessness, asking, "Are they really just going to begin fighting like this?"

Mo Yu gazed at the young man and young woman on the bridge. She remained silent, her mood somewhat complex.

This match was a battle between the young leaders of the northern and southern factions of the Orthodoxy, and it was also the first conflict between the new and conservative factions of the Orthodoxy. More importantly, this match was a competition of wills between the Divine Empress and the Pope.

Chen Changsheng stood on the bridge, watching the water flow by. As he watched the snow fall into the water and then vanish, the nervousness and anxiety was the same as those pieces of snow, gradually fading into nothingness.

He sensed something and turned to look through the falling snow at the other end of the bridge.

It was a very simple action with no weight, but it was done very slowly, because this turning had already used up many years.

Separated by the wind and snow, he saw the young woman at the foot of the bridge.

This was the first time he saw Xu Yourong, his once-fiancée and the owner of those letters and the bamboo dragonfly.

Just as he had thought about on the bridge, from a certain perspective, his life had been changed because of this young woman.

Far too many things had been caused for her sake, yet this was their first time meeting.

Before they met, he had already heard excessive praise over her and the things she had done, but he would still imagine what she looked like. Did she have black and beautiful long hair, was she really born with such a beautiful appearance...at present, he still had not seen her face, had not seen her black hair, but he still felt like the her standing in the snow at the foot of the bridge was completely in line with his imagination.

She was in a white dress. There was no umbrella in her hand and she wore a curtained hat. The gauze hanging from the brim of the hat obscured her face.

He could vaguely make out a little and he couldn't see clearly, but she was probably very beautiful.

He couldn't see, but she was very beautiful, because it was a sort



of indescribable beauty.

Yes, even with the veil covering her face, even if she just quietly stood there, she would give people the feeling of a beauty beyond description.

She stood amidst the wind and snow, and it seemed possible that she could at any time depart with the wind, vanish with the snow.

She had never been a person of this mortal world. Instead, she should be living on some high mountain where no man had walked, lofty and unsullied.

As he stared at the young woman in the snow, Chen Changsheng finally understood why Xu Shiji and Tang Thirty-Six were so certain that he would change his mind upon seeing her, why Tang Thirty-Six had said many people had delayed their marriage after seeing her, why she made others speechless.

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The gauze in front of Xu Yourong's lightly swayed in the wind. She was nodding in greeting.

Chen Changsheng nodded his head to return the greeting, thinking, now what should I say? But in the next moment, he realized that over the past few days and this moment, he had been

overthinking things.

The young woman in the snow clearly had no intention of talking. She just quietly stood there.

The two banks of the Luo River were both deathly still.

There was only the gentle sound of the river waters flowing around the great ship.

He could almost even hear the sound of snow falling.

Everyone else thought the same as Chen Changsheng, believing that he should say something. They all wanted to hear just what he and Xu Yourong would say before their battle.

To the important figures of the Imperial Court and the Li Palace, this match on the Bridge of Helplessness held a great significance. The common folk of the capital were also aware of this, but they didn't care too much. Who would inherit the Divine Empress's authority, who would be the next Pope...neither of these had much to do with the lives of the common people. When the coup of the Hundred Herb Garden occurred, after the bloody incident of the Orthodox Academy, the capital was still the capital.

What they were all concerned about was the gratitude and resentment, the love and hatred, between these two participants of the battle.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were engaged, or perhaps as was rumored, the Pope had forcefully annulled the engagement. However, this fact had no bearing on their attention.

The two were originally fiancé and fiancée, and should be husband and wife.

Speaking of this matter made people sigh regretfully. Last autumn, because of this engagement, the people of the capital had even besieged the Orthodox Academy and cursed Chen Changsheng like he was a dog, even inventing curses just for him. Yet now, after merely a year, the people of the capital had changed their position. They hoped that this marriage could succeed. This was because, in their view, Chen Changsheng was already a complete match for Xu Yourong, and he was a person of Zhou—Xu Yourong marrying Qiushan Jun was much worse than marrying him.

What these people on the two banks of the Luo River were thinking of, what they were waiting for, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong did not know, nor would they probably care.

They just calmly stared at each other through the wind and snow, saying nothing to each other.

For a very long time, nobody spoke.

Right until the end, he and she did not speak.

The deathly stillness of the Bridge of Helplessness ultimately was not broken, only awakened through an action.

Xu Yourong reached out her hand to grasp a sword.

The sword she used was naturally no ordinary sword, but a renowned sword.

The temple sword of Holy Maiden Peak, after several centuries, had finally returned to the hands of the current Holy Maiden.

The hand grasping the sword was very white, even paler than the snow.

Chen Changsheng did not notice this point. He only gazed at her eyes, but he found that no matter what he did, his and her eyes could never meet.

The gauze hanging from the curtained hat was apparently rather strange.

Xu Yourong drew the temple sword from the sheath.

A sword cry rose up from the Bridge of Helplessness and drifted down the Luo River.

Ripples began to form on the calm surface of the water, and then they transformed into mighty waves that incessantly slammed

against the bow of the ship and the two river banks.

Simultaneously, countless great waves began to rise up in Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness.

# Chapter 514 - The Descent Of Heavenly Music

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There were no opening remarks, no conversation, no foreshadowing, no sudden flurry of wind and snow.

In such an ordinary and uninteresting manner, this battle that was the focus of thousands of gazes began.

Xu Yourong unsheathed the sword very slowly, as if the movement had been divided into countless actions and then put back together again.

As the temple sword emerged from the sheath, the true essence attached to the sword incessantly collided against the sheath, causing the sword to ring out countless times. Combined together, they created a long and timeless sword cry.

The sword had not completely emerged from the sheath, but the attack had already begun.

Her attack was this sword cry which rang out over the Bridge of Helplessness.

The sword cry fell on his ear and went straight into Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness. Though it was invisible, he could clearly sense it.

Everyone on the two banks of the Luo River could hear this sword cry that surged like a wave. On the ship, a few students from the Ivy Academies who had slightly weaker cultivations were affected by the sword cry and paled.

"The South Sea Sword Cry." Linghai Zhiwang looked at Xu Yourong on the Bridge of Helplessness and commented, "Myriad stormy waves rise up with the sword. As expected, the Holy Maiden achieved some sort of enlightenment when she cultivated by the South Sea last year."

On the side, Mao Qiuyu said nothing, only wrinkled his brow.

Upon hearing this sword cry resounding from the Bridge of Helplessness, Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu's expressions flickered. Xu Yourong had not truly begun to attack, but she was already so imposing. Could Chen Changsheng cope with it?

Mo Yu raised her eyebrows. Very few people knew that Xu Yourong was most skilled in archery, but she knew. Thus, she had been perplexed as to why Xu Yourong had not utilized the Tong Bow, instead using the temple sword. Was it because she looked down on Chen Changsheng?

Suddenly, she thought of a possibility: Xu Yourong wished to defeat Chen Changsheng in the path of the sword which he was most skilled at? From this, was she seeking to shatter his philosophy of cultivation and destroy any possibility of his becoming Pope?

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The sword cry resounded on the Bridge of Helplessness. Those snowflakes descending from the sky were not affected in the least, but the same could not be said for Chen Changsheng. Because of this sword cry, a ferocious storm seemed to have risen up in his sea of consciousness. Enormous waves reached up to the sky. It made his spiritual sense extremely unstable, and he could even faintly perceive signs that it was about to disintegrate.

It was just the pulling out of a sword, yet it possessed such might?

In the information that Chen Changsheng had looked over, there was nothing mentioning that Xu Yourong was skilled in these sorts of fighting techniques. In the few battles of hers that had been recorded, she displayed understanding of every sort of technique.

Only at this moment did he confirm that Xu Yourong's cultivation in the path of the sword was actually so profound. She was still far from great masters such as Su Li, but in terms of her comprehension of the principles of the heavens and earth, she was not one bit inferior.

This sword cry was in accordance with the principles of the heavens and earth, a storm that had come from the South Sea.



Chen Changsheng looked at her sword, moving around his spiritual sense and forcefully suppressed the waves in his sea of consciousness.

In truth, the speed at which Xu Yourong pulled out her sword was not at all slow, but because each action was so clear, the scene seemed to move somewhat slowly.

The temple sword leaving its sheath seemed like a very long journey.

Finally, the temple sword reached the end of its journey.

The waves in the Luo River grew even fiercer.

Chen Changsheng's sea of consciousness was assailed by this sword cry and was on the verge of instability.

It was precisely at this moment that Chen Changsheng chose to make his move.

Clang!

The space above the Bridge of Helplessness was instantly silenced.

The Stainless Sword emerged from the sheath and stabbed towards a snowflake in the sky.

This attack had no material being, but was instead an illusory strike. The snowflake that was the target of the sword edge was not even affected, continuing its slow descent to the surface of the bridge.

But there was still the clang of a sword.

If it was said that Xu Yourong unsheathing her sword was a very slow process, Chen Changsheng unsheathing his sword was swift to the extreme.

The temple sword had calmly traversed tens of thousands of li while his sword had shot up straight from the earth to the heavens.

[A silver vase burst.](#)

(This is part of a line from the poem "Pipa Song" by Bai Juyi, meaning a sudden cracking sound.)

A crisp cry.

A crisp sword cry abruptly appeared and then entered the sword cry of the temple sword.

The sword cry, distant and calm, yet holding the power of countless storms, momentarily paused.

The instant the temple sword departed from the sheath, the sword cry once more rang out, even brighter than before.

Chen Changsheng drew back his sword and lightly rotated his body, almost as if he was using his sleeve to shoo away that falling snowflake.

Another illusory strike descended from the sky and back to shore, dashing apart the waves.

Wind entered the mountain cave.

It howled.

With these two sword sounds ringing out, the sword cry finally came to a stop.

Silence once more fell over the Bridge of Helplessness.

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As Mao Qiuyu, Linghai Zhiwang, and the rest looked at the bridge one li away, gazed at the young woman atop the bridge,

they felt rather complex emotions.

This battle had begun just moments ago—Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong had only taken out their swords—but the mystery and danger within were not any less that of a battle between two ordinary initial level Star Condensation cultivators.

Everyone on the great ship honestly asked themselves, if the person standing there were themselves at that age, would they be an opponent for these two youths? The final verdict made them sigh with sorrow: perhaps they would have lost when Xu Yourong pulled out her sword. As for those cultivators of the path of the sword, when they saw this scene, their minds were agitated and they were filled with a boundless sense of defeat. They thought, when compared to Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng, can my sword even deserve to be called a sword?

"What sort of sword technique is this?" someone asked from the crowd.

No person responded to his question.

Mao Qiuyu sighed, "Chen Changsheng's response was truly genius."

People such as they could naturally see that the sword style Chen Changsheng had used was South Stream Temple's Descent of Heavenly Music.

This sword style called the Descent of Heavenly Music was actually a sword dance used in Holy Maiden Peak in their ceremonies to the starry sky. It essentially had no power and was rarely used in actual combat situations.

But for Chen Changsheng to use it at this moment was truly the most ideal choice.

Because this sword style and Xu Yourong's South Sea Sword Cry were two techniques from the same source, and it was also the most capable style to calm a swordsman's mind.

The Heavenly Music descended, the sword sounds transformed into law, clashing with and conforming to Xu Yourong's South Sea Sword Cry. Even the greatest waves would naturally be calmed.

Daoist Siyuan sneered, "Everyone knows that to use the Descent of Heavenly Music to dispel the South Sea Sword Cry is the best choice. Just what's so genius about that?"

Mao Qiuyu calmly replied, "The problem is that not everyone can learn the sword styles of the South Stream Temple. Moreover, if one did get the opportunity to learn them, who would possibly think about going to learn this sword dance meant for use when sacrificing to the stars?"

Daoist Siyuan had no words to respond.

This member of the Six Prefects understood many of the sword

styles of South Stream Temple. He had even learned two of the most powerful secret sword styles of South Stream Temple, but not even he had learned the Descent of Heavenly Music.

Just as Su Li and Chen Changsheng had discussed in the wilderness, to learn a sword style had never been an easy affair. One couldn't just see another display the sword forms and then just copy them by rote to learn another's sword style. One had to use the proper method of circulating true essence that corresponded to these sword techniques. Only when the two formed into one could one be considered as having learned a sword style.

Chen Changsheng did not possess the true essence circulation method for these sword styles from South Stream Temple, but he had other methods. Starting from last year when he began teaching Luoluo, then his treatment of Xuanyuan Po and Zhexiu, and then adding on his theories from the past few years, his substitute plan was now exceptionally ripe, such that even Su Li would gasp in admiration.

Through these substitute methods, all these sword styles he used would definitely be much more lacking in power, but in terms of sword intent, they would be almost exact duplicates.

His previous use of the Descent of Heavenly Music had originally been precisely for its sword intent.

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One sword cry, two sword songs.

The wind and snow over the Bridge of Helplessness were as before.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong quietly stood at their original positions.

It was like nothing had happened, nothing had changed.

In reality, a change had already occurred: they were wielding their swords.

Wielding swords naturally meant they intended to attack with them. Amidst the drifting snow, Chen Changsheng suddenly vanished. In the next second, he appeared before Xu Yourong at an extremely close distance.

Cries of shock could faintly be heard coming from the distant ship.

When confronting a powerful opponent like Xu Yourong, any sort of hidden cards or plans had no meaning. The only option he had was to fully display all the things he was most skilled at and then see whether he could defeat his opponent or not.

So he did not hesitate to use the Yeshi Step, and then he used the Heavenly Dao Academy's Sword of Hithering Light.

Of all the techniques he knew, this was the fastest.

Just like how his Yeshi Step was the fastest.

Xu Yourong's first attack had walked the profound path.

His first attack did not require much, only the word 'fast'.

Whoosh.

It seemed like even the air itself over the Bridge of Helplessness was pierced through.

A bright sword glow shone upon the falling snow and the gloomy sky, and it also shone upon the white gauze hanging from the brim of Xu Yourong's hat.

The point of the sword stabbed at Xu Yourong's left arm.

Cries of shock arose once more from the distant ship.

Chen Changsheng's attack was incomparably swift. The sword piercing through the air was even faster than sound.



And yet...it wasn't faster than Xu Yourong's sword.

At some point, the temple sword had appeared in the snowy air, accurately and calmly receiving the Stainless Sword.

Dong!

Worthy of the reincarnation of the true Phoenix, she possessed an unimaginable strength, and she naturally possessed a nigh-unattainable speed as well. The Heavenly Dao Academy's Sword of Hithering Light could be even faster, but how could it be faster than the Phoenix that could cover ten thousand li with a single flap of its wings?

What shocked Chen Changsheng even more was that when the two swords clashed, he realized that Xu Yourong had used the flat of the sword!

The flat of the sword had to confront the wind, so it naturally couldn't move faster than the point of the sword piercing through the air, but her sword had unexpectedly arrived before his.

If Xu Yourong had not blocked his sword and instead decided to compare speeds, would he be able to draw back his sword fast enough?

This was something that had not happened, so he could not know the answer. In addition, in his current situation, he simply didn't have the time to ponder these questions.

The Stainless Sword and temple sword met, and the surrounding snowflakes, seeming to have been caught up in some sort of turbulence, madly scattered away.

The two swords separated a little.

The Qi of the Bridge of Helplessness suddenly changed.

This was because Xu Yourong's Qi had changed.

She who had just been quietly standing there suddenly became tall and large.

She had not truly become tall and large, but instead exuded a sort of presence.

The presence of a god overlooking the people from the sky appeared on her body.

She slashed down at Chen Changsheng!

Different from how the ordinary people imagined the Holy Maiden, different from the impressions the common folk of the capital had of her.

This strike did not feel like it had departed from the mortal world, ethereal and unsullied.

It did not possess an elusive and drifting mystery.

Xu Yourong's strike was extremely simple.

Because it was simple, she could show her abilities to their full extent!

Her two hands gripped the hilt of the temple sword and raised it up to her head, drawing the hilt level with her forehead. She seemed to be offering a sacrifice to the sky.

Then, the temple sword fell through the sky, descending from her brow, pressing forward with all her vigor and spirit!

A seemingly infinite amount of true essence and an immovable spiritual sense spurred an incomparably fierce sword energy and drove it straight towards Chen Changsheng's head!

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# Chapter 515 - A Great Avalanche

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Boom!

The snowflakes above the bridge all frenziedly danced, surging forward with the temple sword.

In the flurry of snow, Chen Changsheng could only see a wall of white before him.

He couldn't see anything, only sense the frightening power of the sword behind the fog of snow.

He felt like he had entered an illusion, confronting not Xu Yourong's sword, but an avalanche.

The snow and ice that had accumulated for thousands of years on the southern face of Holy Maiden Peak suddenly collapsed and, with the rumbling of snow, surged towards him.

No matter how exquisite his swordplay, would it be able to pierce through this collapsing mountain face?

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The two banks of the Luo River were very quiet.

The great ship was even more so, pervaded with an eerie silence.

Both Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang said nothing.

Tang Thirty-Six's fists were clenched tightly, but he still could not prevent himself from shaking.

Su Moyu's complexion was rather pale, his lips moving as he muttered something to himself.

At some point, the pupils of Zhexiu's eyes had reddened, and he inwardly increased the strength of the hand which he used to hold the walking stick.

All of this was because of the fog of snow atop the Bridge of Helplessness and the attack behind it.

Tang Thirty-Six and Su Moyu were both keenly aware that they would not be able to receive this attack. Unless they used their life-saving artifacts, they might be heavily injured, or...and this was Xu Yourong's first genuine attack, which also signified that their current selves couldn't even take one of her attacks.

They found this fact rather difficult to accept, yet they were forced to accept it.

Zhexiu thought differently from them, but even he had to

acknowledge the terrifying strength of this attack.

Her innate talent was truly too powerful.

Besides Qiushan Jun's blood of the true dragon and Luoluo's White Emperor bloodline, who in the world could contend with it?

Even those peak Star Condensation experts standing at the bow of the ship who were only a step away from the Divine Domain couldn't help but envy Xu Yourong's innate talent. Everyone said that cultivating the Dao was a gift granted by the starry sky to intelligent beings. Was Xu Yourong the gift itself?

However, a rather interesting fact was that even at this moment, when everyone was seeing this attack of Xu Yourong's which carried the force of an avalanche, no one was worried about Chen Changsheng.

Not Tang Thirty-Six, the people of the Orthodox Academy, or anyone else.

Yes, Chen Changsheng's innate talent was very ordinary, but after he returned from Xunyang City to the capital, all the initial level Star Condensation experts that had been defeated at his hand were proof that he was no average upper level Ethereal Opening cultivator.

Xu Yourong's sword energy was like a mountain face collapsing, a great avalanche.

But even more terrifying was her temple sword that followed this blizzard.

Just like how his fastest sword could not be faster than Xu Yourong's, Xu Yourong's strongest sword would find it incapable of breaking through his.

He was calm and serene, his sword held horizontally in front of him, drawn up to his brow.

His action was very natural, identical to the thirty thousand times he had raised the sword in this half-year's worth of time.

A sword held horizontally was the character '—'.

The cliff was straight and tough, the iron chains appeared, the dam was eternally firm.

This was the Stupid Sword that not even Su Li was able to learn.

The avalanche had come, the howling wind mournfully shrieking and the chunks of snow like arrows.

The temple sword, carrying the wind and snow, heavily chopped down against the Stainless Sword.

This time, when these two swords clashed, there was no crisp

clash, but a massive boom.

Like a god in the sky had brought up a metal hammer and smashed it down against a metal board.

All the snow on the bridge was jolted into the air.

Under the bridge, the Luo River rose up and down in turmoil.

The temple sword chopped down!

With its descent, an unimaginably majestic energy fell upon the Stainless Sword.

The ten thousand years of accumulated snow crashing down broke straight through the seemingly firm cliff and poured into the great river, beginning to hammer against the chains and dam in the river!

With an extremely piercing sound, the Stainless Sword ever-so-slightly bent!

The Stupid Sword that had never been broken through after Chen Changsheng had learned it seemed to show signs of crumbling!

He had already prepared himself for this. At some point, his left hand had taken up the Vault Sheath, and with a scraping sound,



the Vault Sheath covered the Stainless Sword's edge.

His left hand gripping the sheath, his right hand gripping the hilt of his sword, he held them horizontally in front of him and firmly received this attack.

Booms continued to sound out.

Attacks continued to furiously rain down.

Kakakaka!

From the wind and snow came the incessant sounds of something very hard being shattered to pieces.

In the snowstorm, one could see Chen Changsheng's figure continuously retreating!

The snowstorm retreated, the Luo River calmed, and the Bridge of Helplessness became clear and bright once more.

Wielding the temple sword, Xu Yourong calmly gazed at him, still not saying a word.

Drawn across the hard surface of the Bridge of Helplessness were two distinct fissures.

Chen Changsheng stood at the end of these two fissures, his feet embedded into the floor. Behind him was a pile of stone fragments.

His shoes and pants were completely shredded and he cut a rather miserable figure.

He suddenly began to cough, his coughs somewhat painful.

It was only one attack.

But he had suffered internal injuries.

The people standing on the two banks of the Luo River couldn't clearly make out the scene on the bridge. They could only see the sudden blizzard and the plumes of dust in the aftermath. Countless cries of shock arose from the crowd.

On the other hand, the great ship was still silent.

Even Linghai Zhiwang and the rest did not aim any jokes or jeers at Chen Changsheng, because regardless of how miserable he was, whether he was wounded or not, he had still managed to receive this strike.

This was enough.

These experts could all clearly see that not even an average initial level Star Condensation cultivator could receive this great

avalanche of Xu Yourong's.

This was one of the frightening properties of innate blood talent. Even when her cultivation level was inferior to her opponent's, she could still use her quantity of true essence and strength of spiritual sense to directly suppress them.

Chen Changsheng looked at Xu Yourong, his gaze resting on the white gauze. He realized that he really couldn't see through.

He couldn't see through her. He knew that Xu Yourong was very strong, but he had not expected that this young woman who gave off such an elegant, beautiful and unworldly feeling was actually powerful to this extent. She had surpassed the category of tyrant and faintly entered the category of kings. And wasn't the Phoenix precisely a natural-born king?

After his battles together with her in the Plains of the Unsetting Sun and their conversations on cultivation in the snowy temples, he had believed that Lady Chujian was already the most genius of cultivators and that even Xu Yourong would be lacking. Now, however, he realized that she was even stronger than Lady Chujian.

Xu Yourong slowly walked over through the snowstorm, her right hand casually carrying the temple sword. She was like a fairy that had descended from the clouds, very difficult to associate with that terrifying avalanche of an attack.

The more calm and indifferent she appeared, the more it filled

opponents with a sense that she could not be defeated.

How could one defeat such a powerful opponent?

Chen Changsheng had pondered this question for many days, and prepared for seven entire days.

On the Bridge of Helplessness, there was a light clack.

The Stainless Sword was inserted into the sheath. He had not sheathed his sword, but connected the sword hilt to the sword sheath. He had not sheathed his sword, but instead made the sword longer, allowing him to display his abilities to their fullest.

Back in Xunyang City when confronting Zhu Luo, he had once done this. He did it out of respect for his most admired Senior Yu Ren and Wang Po, and it was also out of respect for her who was walking through the snowstorm.

A sword intent appeared on the Bridge of Helplessness amidst the wind and snow.

This sword intent had appeared so suddenly, yet there was nothing strange about it. On the contrary, it was exceptionally open and candid, right and proper, giving off an upright and frank feeling.

This sword intent was very straight, very straightforward.

This sword intent was hot, burning hot.

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# Chapter 516 - Half A Bridge Of Rain, Half A Bridge Of Snow

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"This sword technique is somewhat out of the ordinary."

Linghai Zhiwang stood at the bow of the ship, looking at the stone bridge a li away covered in snow. Upon sensing that sword intent, his emotionless face finally showed a little change.

Daoist Siyuan commented, "Principal Shang's disciple is naturally out of the ordinary."

The sword intent Chen Changsheng was releasing was very powerful, but this alone was not enough to shock experts of this level. The reason for the change in mood was from the two flavors merged within the sword intent.

This sword intent was burning hot.

Chen Changsheng was very much aware that in both quantity of true essence and strength of spiritual sense, he was far from reaching Xu Yourong who possessed the blood of the true Phoenix. As a result, he did not hesitate to ignite the ball of fire in his heart.

This battle had just begun and he had not yet made a genuine attack. The attack he now made was by necessity his most powerful one.

A strand of his spiritual sense fell upon the vast plain of snow surrounding his Ethereal Palace. Immediately, the vast plain of snow began to blaze. The Bridge of Helplessness also began to blaze, and although not an ember of flame could be seen, one could feel the temperature rise.

In a flash, all those pieces of snow falling towards his body melted, transforming midair into water and splashing onto his body and the bridge. As a result, all the snow he had endured from the exchange just a moment ago was completely washed away.

The sword intent was very straight, sharing some similarities with the technique he had used to block Xu Yourong's mighty avalanche of a sword. However, it was even straighter, not a mountain cliff or a river dam, just a straight line.

Solely because it was straight, it was unyielding. The Stainless Sword was still in his hand, not moving to strike, but amidst the freezing wind and snow of the Bridge of Helplessness, a perfectly straight line appeared on the surface of the bridge.

This line divided the Bridge of Helplessness into two completely different worlds.

He was on this side, Xu Yourong was on that side.

Rain was on this side, snow was on that side.

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The sword intent enveloped the stone bridge, giving birth to rain and dispersing the snow.

Chen Changsheng raised the Stainless Sword, his eyes calm and resolute.

This was the first time after learning the Blazing Sword from Su Li that he had attempted to ignite his true essence to such a frenzied extent, but the amount of true essence and energy on his sword was still less than that of Xu Yourong's great avalanche. However, it was more brimming with spirit, sharper and more focused.

Mao Qiuyu suddenly took a step forward. Staring at the distant bridge, he wrinkled his brow in disbelief, "Why does it feel a little like Po's path of the blade?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "It's precisely Wang Po's path of the blade."

As he spoke, he had a very solemn expression. Previously, he had said that since this battle only decided victory and defeat, not life and death, he didn't care that much about it. Now, however, upon seeing Chen Changsheng's sword intent, he began to lose faith in his judgment. And then, he began to get worried.



Once those people standing at the bow of the ship heard Mao Qiuyu and Tang Thirty-Six's words, they were all rather shaken. Soon after, they very naturally began to think of that battle in the rain at Xunyang City. As for Xue He who similarly walked the path of the blade, his mood was complex. His eyes were fixed on the Bridge of Helplessness, not wanting to miss a single detail of the following action.

Xu Shiji expressionlessly commented, "For this child to have the opportunity to study from so many experts, his luck is extremely good."

"This has nothing to do with luck." With a dignified expression, Mao Qiuyu declared, "To learn Wang Po's path of the blade, to walk his path of the blade, this isn't something that just anyone can do."

This statement was correct.

Chen Changsheng's previous use of the sword style of South Stream Temple, his display of the Descent of Heavenly Music, could be explained as a result of him being widely-read. Moreover, he had the assistance of the Orthodoxy and had also had many fortuitous encounters in his cultivation of the path of the sword.

But to learn Wang Po's path of the blade was not so simple.

He needed to believe in Wang Po's path of the blade, to practice it with absolute confidence.

And this was precisely what concerned Tang Thirty-Six.

Wang Po's path of the blade rested on the word 'straight'.

No matter how powerful the enemy before the blade, even if it were an expert simply impossible to defeat, the hand holding the blade had to be steady, and the direction the blade edge pointed still had to be straight.

To accomplish this, the heart of the wielder had to be as straight as the edge of his blade.

That seemingly poverty-stricken middle-aged man had used his countless battles, in Tianliang County, at the Wenshui Tangs, in Scholartree Manor of the south, and in Xunyang City to demonstrate this point.

A silence hung over the bow of the ship. Those experts who far surpassed Chen Changsheng in strength all asked themselves if they would be able to walk Wang Po's path of the blade. Ultimately, they could only reject the notion.

On the Bridge of Helplessness.

Chen Changsheng's sword had not struck, but his sword intent had already emerged.

The snowflakes falling from the sky transformed into raindrops and wove themselves into curtains before splattering against the

ground.

The raindrops closest to him all evaporated into mist, enveloping his body within.

Xu Yourong stood in the snow, her eyes a little apprehensive, revealing a grave expression. The white gauze obscured her face, the mist disturbed her vision, but none of this affected her perception of this sword intent.

She was keenly aware that if she were to cross that line in the middle of the Bridge of Helplessness, she would have to confront Chen Changsheng's full-throated and, by necessity, most powerful attack.

This attack would inevitably decide victory and defeat.

Of course, she could continue to stand in the snow, waiting for some change to possibly occur. But this could also mean that Chen Changsheng might be able to push this sword intent to an even more terrifying realm.

If he could, that is.

Without any reservation, Chen Changsheng ignited his true essence. Using Wang Po's unsparing path of the blade, he drew a distinct path through the wind and snow of the Bridge of Helplessness.

He drew a path for this match.

He allowed Xu Yourong to make the choice.

The white gauze fluttered.

Xu Yourong closed her eyes.

Then, she opened them once more.

To close and open her eyes required only a brief moment.

In this moment, she made her choice.

Under the bridge, the Luo River received the incessant battering of snow and rain and lightly swayed.

The great ship a distance from the bridge also lightly swayed.

The painter from the Pavilion of Divination sitting at the very front of the ship suddenly began to sway. The other two painters also seemed to be shaken.

Then, their shocked, trembling, and uneasy voices rang out.

"This sword technique?"

"It is going to end so quickly?"

The three painters were all of the Star Condensation Realm, but they were not the strongest people present.

However, they had spectated and recorded countless famous battles and so were very sensitive to changes in a battle. As a result, they were the first to understand just what had occurred.

Soon after, Mao Qiuyu, Daoist Siyuan, and the rest understood.

A deathly stillness hung over the Luo River.

This was all because the young woman atop the Bridge of Helplessness had once more opened her eyes.

The fluttering white gauze and the flurry of snow could not obstruct her sight.

Faint golden specks of light floated out from the white gauze.

Did those specks of light originate from her eyes?

The temple sword trembled in the snowstorm, the snowflakes falling upon it jolted into fog.

The Bridge of Helplessness was half a fog of snow, half a mist of rain. It seemed to be amongst the clouds, bearing no resemblance to the mortal world.

At this moment, Xu Yourong also seemed to be no longer part of the mortal world.

She was so solemn and divine that even the most ordinary of people would be able to tell that a strength that exceeded the realm of mortals had appeared on her body.

At this scene, Mao Qiuyu, Daoist Siyuan, and Linghai Zhiwang were all struck with profound disbelief. They simultaneously asked with trembling voices, "The Sword of Great Light?"

# Chapter 517 - The Intimidating Radiance Of Youth

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When those three painters from the Pavilion of Divination cried out in shock, many people on the great ship guessed at what sort of technique Xu Yourong was using. It was just that it was far too shocking, so none of them dared to believe it. Only now, after hearing the words of Mao Qiuyu and the other two did they finally confirm that it really was as they had imagined.

There was an eerie silence, with only the sound of the waters of the Luo River gently slapping against the hull of the ship.

They all looked at the distant stone bridge, covered in misty rain and foggy snow, that scene which seemed more appropriate in the land of fairies, and all thought in shock, is the Sword of Great Light really going to appear once more?

Countless years ago, at the very beginning of the schism between the Orthodoxy's north and south, the first Holy Maiden entered the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths and comprehend the Dao, entering in autumn and remaining all the way until the summer. At the end, under the pavilion at the very front of the Divine Path, she created two grand sword techniques. One was a technique said to be the most ingenious and incomprehensible 'Departing Spring'. The other was the legendary Sword of Great Light.

The Sword of Great Light possessed a divine aura surpassing the mortal world, as well as unimaginably terrifying might. Together with the Orthodoxy's Scroll of the Harmonious Sun, the seventh

move of the White Emperor's Burning Sea Style, the Halving Blade Style's 'Skybreak', and the 'Autumn Slaying' of the spear style of the Chen Imperial clan, they were called the continent's Five Grand Masterstrokes.

The Scroll of the Harmonious Sun comprehended the Heavenly Dao, forgetting the sea of stars. The Burning Sea Style was incomparably tyrannical. The Halving Blade slaughtered all things. With an indifferent look, the Frost God Spear could cause all living things of the world to wither away. Each had its own Dao, unsurpassed in bearing and spirit. But the Sword of Great Light was different from the rest, more similar to offering a sacrifice to the stars, a technique that transcended the path of the sword.

The Sword of Great Light was an almost unimaginable sword technique. It had no specific style, instead seeming like the essence of all sword techniques, the complex orbits of the myriad stars. Ultimately, it was demonstrated through the simplest of methods.

This sword technique was simultaneously simple and complex. Every ray of light was a sword, and the rays of light traveled between the heavens and earth, able to imitate all things and reach any place. As long as one's body was between heaven and earth, how could one avoid it?

Besides the legendary "Departing Spring" and the "Scroll of Time", no more profound and incomprehensible technique could be found in the Orthodoxy. To learn it would naturally be extraordinarily difficult. The learner had to clearly understand all the sword styles of the world. Then, with the assistance of the divine Qi of the temple sword, they could take their



understandings of the path of the sword and perfectly meld them with the teachings of the Orthodoxy.

To learn the Sword of Great Light necessitated the assistance of the temple sword's divine Qi to comprehend. Many years ago, Zhou Dufu had invaded Holy Maiden Peak and taken the temple sword away, resulting in the loss of the Sword of Great Light.

"Hasn't the Sword of Great Light been lost for several centuries?"

The people on the ship all stared at the fantastical scene atop the Bridge of Helplessness, stared at the indistinct figure of Xu Yourong. They couldn't help but gasp in shock and awe.

Linghai Zhiwang replied, "The temple sword has already reappeared in the world."

It was at this point that many of them realized that the sword in Xu Yourong's had was actually the temple sword of South Stream Temple. Soon after, they recalled the rumors about Chen Changsheng discovering the Sword Pool in the Garden of Zhou and knew that this temple sword must have been returned to South Stream Temple by the Li Palace. They couldn't help but feel that this matter was a little disorderly.

Mo Yu stared at the Bridge of Helplessness, her elegant eyebrows arched.

Besides time, there was no other way to comprehend and

understand the divine Qi of the temple sword. Back when the temple sword was still in Holy Maiden Peak, not every generation of Holy Maiden was able to grasp the Sword of Great Light. Those Holy Maidens able to grasp the Sword of Great Light often had to greatly advance in cultivation and then spend several decades before they were finally able to thoroughly comprehend it. Mo Yu was well aware that Xu Yourong had only turned sixteen last month and had only received the temple sword from the Li Palace not seven days ago. So just how had she managed to pull it off?

Just as the people on the ship were all struck speechless, a change occurred on the bridge. Countless bright, but not dazzling, rays of light pierced through the snowy fog to illuminate the Luo River and the cold-resistant willow branches on the two banks. The fairyland instantly transformed into the Divine Kingdom, the stone bridge seemingly the path that led to the Divine Kingdom.

It was now confirmed without question that Xu Yourong really was using the Sword of Great Light.

Rays of light pierced through the snow, causing the light and shadow in the fog of snow to shift, creating countless indistinct marks. Those marks were sword intents, frozen and unmoving, hidden and unreleased.

If those rays of light in the snow were to make contact with something, then these countless sword intents would come with the snow and appear in the rain. Although at this point, no one had seen those sword intents actually transform into sword techniques, people could already sense that countless sword techniques were concealed within them.

This was the most frightening aspect of the Sword of Great Light. If Chen Changsheng raised his sword to confront it, these sword intents would all transform, and who could eliminate all the light between the heavens and earth?

If it were someone like Mao Qiuyu or Linghai Zhiwang, these experts only a step from the Divine Domain, they would only need to use their vigorous true essence and profound cultivations to forcefully suppress and then shatter Xu Yourong's Sword of Great Light. They only needed to pay the corresponding rather minuscule price. But Chen Changsheng had a similar cultivation level to Xu Yourong, and his amount of true essence and strength of spiritual sense was far inferior to hers. How could he break this sword?

Of course, the Sword of Great Light was no earthly technique. To use this sword, one would inevitably have to pay an enormous price. Even with Xu Yourong's Heavenly Phoenix blood, she could most likely use it just once.

If Chen Changsheng could not break this Sword of Great Light, his defeat was certain. If he could break the Sword of Great Light, then Xu Yourong's loss was without question. This was also precisely the reason that painter from the Pavilion of Divination had uttered those words in shock.

Today's match on the Bridge of Helplessness had been the focus of everyone's attention. For this battle, the common folk of the capital had waited several months, or even close to two years.

Was it possible for this match to end so quickly?

Many people were very surprised. No matter if it were Mao Qiuyu, Linghai Zhiwang, or Daoist Siyuan in that battle, none of them would have allowed themselves to be forced into such desperate straits so soon.

Yes, these were desperate straits.

This was the case for both Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

Victory or defeat depended on a single attack—Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were both people very confident in themselves, and people with such self-confidence would never allow themselves to be forced into such a situation.

But they still acted in this way, neither leaving a path of retreat for themselves.

Chen Changsheng had used Wang Po's path of the blade to draw a path on the snow bridge. Xu Yourong had used her own path to receive this path. All this was because they were both upright youths.

Youths did not need to keep any reserve.

They would not hide their weakness, much less hide their attacks.

What youths wanted to do was to intimidate.

As a result, this battle that had just barely begun had reached its end.

Senior experts like Linghai Zhiwang were no longer youths, and had even forgotten their own youths, so they could not understand. Tang Thirty-Six could understand, Su Moyu understood, Prince Chen Liu could faintly understand, and Zhexiu understood the most. Because they were all young people.

"Both Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong don't enjoy performing for others." Tang Thirty-Six turned his head to glance at the dense mass of people crowding the two banks of the Luo River and said, "It will end very quickly."

At this moment, a cry of shock suddenly rose up from the great ship.

On the Bridge of Helplessness, the fog of snow madly danced and the mist of rain suddenly scattered.

Countless rays of light concealing countless sword intents assaulted Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng raised his sword and stabbed at a certain place in the rain and snow.

There was nothing new about this attack, much less any deep meaning behind it.

Yet the rain and snow on the bridge abruptly ceased.

# Chapter 518 - Heaven And Earth

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A sword glow emerged, but compared to the boundless light surging over from the fog of snow on the other side, it was fairly dim, completely unworthy of mentioning. The trajectory the sword drew through the misty rain and the position it descended towards were both ordinary and uninteresting. Anyone could see that it was a very normal sword technique. Yet just as the sword struck, the misty rain and foggy snow falling from the sky ceased. Even the boundless light brought along by the temple sword began to fall away, ceasing to be as it approached the Stainless Sword!

The Sword of Great Light had not arrived, but what it carried along through the mists was sword intent, incorporeal and formless. Yet Chen Changsheng had seen through the intention of the temple sword that was hidden behind the Sword of Great Light, because he used the Intellectual Sword. He had used an entire seven days to wash clean his insight, as he wanted to see what was true.

To be able to guess at the sword intents hidden within the mists and to be able to see the truth that was yet to be did not make it easy to break. How did he do it? The seemingly casual stab of the Stainless Sword, that incredibly ordinary sword technique—both were especially appropriate for the situation. It was just like he was painting birds and flowers in the gongbi style. His final stroke seemed casual and uninterested, a twisted and strengthless ink line, yet if one looked at it from just a little farther away, one could see that it was a plum branch.

A casual dot of ink could also be the dot of an eye. An ordinary brushstroke could at times bring an entire painting to life.

The problem was, in order to apply the dot of ink and draw the brushstroke at the appropriate moment, in the appropriate situation, countless hours of practice and comprehension were required. Only this way could one know where the stroke should fall and what sort of brush style should be used.

What sort of brush style was this? What sort of sword technique was this?

From one of the floors below the main deck of the great ship, a rather unsure voice said, "The Plum Hut Short Sword?"

The speaker was a lecturer of the Temple Seminary. With his status, it was naturally impossible for him to stand at the bow of the ship, but separated by a bit more than a li of distance, he still managed with great difficulty to clearly make out the attack Chen Changsheng had made through the misty rain. He found the technique Chen Changsheng used to be very familiar. He was deeply shocked and inadvertently spoke.

Many people heard his comment and, upon recalling the scene, realized that Chen Changsheng really had used the Temple Seminary's extremely obscure Plum Hut Short Sword. For a moment, no one could muster words to speak. The fact that Chen Changsheng's path of the sword had dabbled in almost everything had long made them numb from shock, but they had simply not imagined that he would actually dare to use such an ordinary style to break Xu Yourong's Sword of Great Light. And it actually seemed like he had succeeded?



Had he really succeeded? No, it had just begun.

How could one of the world's Five Grand Masterstrokes be so easy to break? Just as Chen Changsheng's attack was breaking through the mist, just as he was displaying his abilities for the first time, the light in the snow that had retreated a little suddenly flourished once more. Transforming into countless sword slashes, carrying along the snow and rain, it chopped at Chen Changsheng once more.

The light was still in the snow, Xu Yourong was still on the other end of the bridge, and those countless sword techniques were still flying over in a disorderly manner. Those sword techniques were still concealed and unreleased. Only by seeing the tracks they left through the fog of snow could one sense how incredibly exquisite they were, what boundless might they contained.

This was the most inconceivable aspect of the Sword of Great Light. The light traveled between heaven and earth and was able to imitate all things, all swords. Even if Chen Changsheng's cultivation on the path of the sword had reached even greater heights, what could he possibly do against this masterstroke of the path of the sword which formed an ever-changing tapestry resembling blossoms of snow?

Xu Yourong's attack did not pause in the slightest. Simultaneous with the cry of the lecturer from the Temple Seminary, the temple sword cleaved through the snow. It was still ten-odd zhang from Chen Changsheng, but the sword energy of the Great Light had already crossed the stone bridge and reached him.

Unlike those past matches before the gate of the Orthodox Academy, Chen Changsheng did not use the Yeshi Step and attempt to escape his opponent's sword energy or attack. This was because after his battle with Nanke, he was keenly aware that attempting to compete in speed with the Heavenly Phoenix was an incredibly foolish choice.

Moreover, since he had drawn a path through the snowy bridge and Xu Yourong had taken this path, how could he retreat? His eyes were calm and focused. Gazing at the wall of light coming towards him, without hesitation, he gripped his sword with both hands, brought it up and then down, slashing at the most concentrated point of the light!

From the ship came Tang Thirty-Six's cheer, "Toppling Mountain Staff! Break!"

Xu Yourong's temple sword had not truly descended. What was breaking through the fog of snow was sword intent.

Similarly, Chen Changsheng, using the Orthodox Academy's Toppling Mountain Staff as a sword, could not really break the Sword of Great Light.

The light within the snow had already transformed into three sword intents, and Chen Changsheng had responded with three sword techniques.

All of this occurred in an exceptionally brief span of time.

Sword glows illuminated the Bridge of Helplessness that was engulfed in rain and snow, then never dispersed, one sword glow following after another.

The air above the Luo River seemed to have become a midsummer thunderstorm, with lightning flashing from time to time.

However, the clouds formed from the fog of snow were still powerful and violent. Undispersed by the lightning, they continued to move to the other side of the bridge.

Neither the people on the ship nor the common folk on the two banks of the river could make out any of the details on the Bridge of Helplessness, such as the fluttering sleeves and white gauze. They could only faintly make out through the mists and fog the figures of Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

The divine Qi released by Xu Yourong's ambling figure was getting thicker and thicker, the pressure of the light getting stronger and stronger. She seemed just like one of the divine sculptures of the Li Palace. On the other hand, Chen Changsheng was still standing at his original position, still just as before. He was calm and quiet as a stone. No matter how furiously the water flowed, it could not change the shape of the rock or move its heart.

One was moving, one was still.

The heart was still, the sword moved.

The Stainless Sword was like a lightning bolt while the temple sword was like a shining sun. However, in the misty rain and foggy snow, they seemed more like two boats in the dusk, traveling the ocean, facing the wind and braving the waves, gradually getting closer to each other. Ultimately, at some point, they would meet.

At this moment, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong's swords had not met, but their sword intents had clashed countless times.

Countless clangs rang out over the Luo River, followed soon after by the crumbling sound of swords cutting through all firm objects.

This Bridge of Helplessness, which with the protection of a powerful array could not even be smashed apart by a warship, seemed quite fragile in the face of the ocean of light and enormous waves stirred up by these two swords. Countless cracks appeared on the firm surface of the bridge, the fragments of rock sent flying instantly being crushed by the sword energy. The two handrails lining the bridge were covered in a dense spiderweb of cracks. Those sculptures in the shape of beasts that had quietly watched the Luo River for many years suffered even more damage from the haphazardly flying sword intent. Stone chips were sent flying, leaving behind mutilated ears and shattered faces.

The people on the two banks of the Luo River were somewhat far and couldn't see clearly what was occurring on the bridge. They could only see the rays of light in the falling snow and hear those sounds. Despite this, they still felt agitated and uneasy. The people on the boat were closer, and were thus more prone to cry in amazement at the exquisite swordplay displayed in the rain and snow.

"That's the Heavenly Pool Sword Style!"

"The Three Chants of the Fisherman's Song!"

"How does he know the sword style of the Emotion-Severing Sect?"

All these excited yells came from below. Those standing at the bow of the ship watched the Bridge of Helplessness in silence.

Yes, there truly was no sword style in this world that could completely break the Sword of Great Light, because this sword technique of Holy Maiden Peak was truly too inconceivable. When the light first appeared in the fog of snow and Chen Changsheng recalled the records in the Daoist Canon, he had a similar feeling. He had never seen such a sword technique that was so complex as to embrace almost all things and yet so simple as to already be in accord with the Heavenly Dao. He hadn't even imagined such a technique before. The Sword of Great Light was already the final frontier of the path of the sword. In his life of cultivation, the only time he had a similar feeling was when he saw Su Li cut a path south with the Heaven Shrouding Sword in the snowy plains of the demon realm.

With his current level of cultivation, he had two methods of breaking the Sword of Great Light. These were to use the final move of the Mount Li Sword Style or, as he had done in the Garden of Zhou and in Xunyang City when confronting Zhu Luo, to use the ten thousand swords of the Sword Pool resting in the Vault Sheath.

However, the former could only end in the both of them dying, so it was not an option. Regarding the latter, it was impossible for him to control the consequences of the ten thousand swords simultaneously attacking. This required more time to calculate than was possible in seven days. As a result, this choice was also out of the question.

Ultimately, the method he used was the third sword that Su Li had taught him, the sword that Su Li could never learn. But this time, he used the sword intent, not the sword itself. He also did not use the sword to defend himself, only using the stupidity of the sword, because regardless of what angle one looked at it from, this method was very stupid.

He would use countless swords to break Xu Yourong's one sword.

The light shone over the mortal world, able to imitate every sword intent between heaven and earth.

Then he would just display every sword technique between heaven and earth.

This method was very stupid, but could someone who could learn all these swords, know when to use these swords, where to use these swords, and thus, in the face of this light, break the shapeless shapes and intentionless intent, truly be a stupid person?

The students and teachers standing on the lower decks of the great ship could not understand this, but those important figures at the bow of the ship clearly understood this point.

So when they stared at those sword intents above the snowy bridge that crisscrossed the sky, they remained silent for a very long time.

The Minister of Rites was not a cultivator, and couldn't restrain his question, "How many swords?"

Linghai Zhiwang expressionlessly replied, "Principal Chen has used forty-three sword techniques."

With a complex expression, Daoist Siyuan declared, "He hasn't even completed one sword technique."

Both of these Prefects of the Orthodoxy had spoken correctly, and it wasn't because one was speaking of Chen Changsheng and the other of Xu Yourong.

Xu Yourong's Sword of Great Light truly had not been fully displayed.

Of course, Chen Changsheng's forty-three swords could be understood as a single sword.

The bow of the ship was silent, but in reality, from the very start, someone had always been talking.

When Chen Changsheng used his sixth sword, Su Moyu

murmured, "I lost."

When Chen Changsheng used his ninth sword, a Divine General who had returned from Sangharama Pass to report to the court wrinkled his brow and shook his head.

When Chen Changsheng used his eleventh sword, Xue He's hand gently caressed his severed arm.

When Chen Changsheng used his twenty-seventh sword, Zhexiu shook his head. If he were to confront Chen Changsheng head-on, he would have lost here. Of course, this was only in swords, not a life-or-death battle. He then glanced at Tang Thirty-Six, rather confused, thinking, could it be that you can last even longer than me?

All this time, Tang Thirty-Six had never said anything about how he had lost, but now he sighed, "Have all of our sword techniques been learned by a dog?"

Many people at the bow of the ship showed ugly complexions, yet no one could refute him.

Everyone knew that Chen Changsheng knew the Daoist Canon from back to front, but could it be that he had also learned all the sword styles of the world?

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# Chapter 519 - The Intellectual Sword Slashes

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Zhexiu gazed at the fog of snow covering the bridge and the rays of light within it, then said, "It truly is the case."

No one refuted him. If it was said that the cultivation Chen Changsheng had displayed on the path of the sword had shocked the crowd into extreme sorrow, the level of cultivation Xu Yourong displayed had shocked the crowd into speechlessness. Just as Tang Thirty-Six had said to Chen Changsheng in the Plum Garden Inn, she had always been someone that made other people speechless.

From the moment the battle started, Xu Yourong had held a firm grasp over the situation on the Bridge of Helplessness. The storm stirred up by Chen Changsheng's sword seemed powerful, but it had still been shattered in the end. If Chen Changsheng could be said to be unimaginably powerful, then just what level was the ever-calm Xu Yourong at?

Sword intent assailed the stone bridge, sword energy pressured the formation, the foggy snow and misty rain flew everywhere, and light confronted the flowing water.

The masses on the two banks of the Luo River could only see the beautiful sight of rain and snow as well as the indistinct battle occurring within that seemed like something from myths. They didn't understand the significance of what was going on and incessantly cheered and shouted. On the other hand, the people on the great ship continued to grow quieter, especially those important figures standing on the bow of the ship.

Because they could see everything.

The stone bridge was between heaven and earth, the rays of light traveled between heaven and earth, and all the sword styles that existed between heaven and earth seemed to appear on the stone bridge.

At their current levels of cultivation, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong could not be considered top experts. On the great ship alone, there were no less than ten people that could easily defeat them. However, the powers of comprehension and cultivation in the path of the sword they had displayed in this battle could be described as close to perfect. This also indicated that they both possessed a nigh-unimaginable potential. As long as nothing too out of the ordinary occurred, every one of these people at the bow of the ship would eventually be surpassed, one by one. As expected, the youngest Holy Maiden of the south in history and the future Pope were extraordinary.

At some point, Xue He had walked to the foremost position on the bow of the ship. As he watched the battle on the bridge, his emotions grew increasingly complex. The hand caressing his severed arm had long since ceased. In the chilly air, his hand seemed to wield a nonexistent blade, as if anxious to join in this battle. Suddenly, his expression changed. In the snow and rain, in those incredibly complex sword slashes, he had seized upon a scent very familiar to him. It was not the scent of a sword, but that of a blade. Just why was that?

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were clearly both using swords, so why had blade intent appeared on the bridge? It was an

awe-inspiring and dangerous blade intent! Xue He suddenly remembered that Chen Changsheng was using Wang Po's path of the blade and felt he understood the reason. He no longer contemplated this problem and continued to immerse himself in the battle before him, attempting to obtain even more insights.

Standing on the bridge, Chen Changsheng did not sense any blade intent. The first reason was that this match was far too tense and it was difficult to get distracted. The second was that he was one of the participants in the battle. Finally, the most important reason of all was that the blade intent sensed by Xue He actually did not originate from his or Xu Yourong's sword, but rather... whenever his and Xu Yourong's sword intent blended together, an extra scent would also be created.

If he had been able to sense this detail, perhaps he would have understood some things.

Regretfully, he was not able to sense it. His sight and mind were completely placed on the countless rays of light in the snow in front of him. His spiritual sense worked at high speeds to constantly calculate, his Intellectual Sword constantly slashed to hold off the frightening Sword of Great Light and push it back beyond the line.

He didn't know how many sword techniques he had used yet, only that he had not yet used every sword style there was between heaven and earth. Persisting was very painful. In Xunyang City, he had only been able to use the Blazing Sword several times. Today, he had already used it several dozen times. The true essence provided from igniting the plain of snow had long since been

consumed. At the moment, he was completely reliant on the lake outside his Ethereal Palace.

But he was not concerned. The facts were proof that his seven days of preparation had been of use. That Xu Yourong was able to learn the Sword of Great Light was beyond his expectations, but those divine and solemn sword techniques that seemed both like a great ocean and also like dewdrops had never been able to break through the line across the center of the Bridge of Helplessness. In addition, he also believed that Xu Yourong would also not be able to last for too long.

When Xu Yourong's true essence was no longer capable of sustaining the Sword of Great Light, it would be his chance to counterattack.

However, for some inexplicable reason, there was this faint feeling in the depths of his heart that didn't want things to end.

Because at the moment, he was very happy.

Even though the Intellectual Sword continued to press his spiritual sense, the Blazing Sword continued to consume his true essence, and the Stupid Sword continued to torture his mind, he was still very happy.

Just like if one was playing chess and suddenly encountered an opponent of similar strength and outstanding level.

It was also like drinking wine and then suddenly encountering a companion who had a similar tolerance for alcohol and that you could drink and compose poems with.

Or perhaps it was like discussing the Dao and meeting a deskmate with kind words and an appearance that was not at all disgusting.

As he gazed at the bright figure of the young woman in the snow, Chen Changsheng felt these sorts of feelings.

He even felt like he had returned to the Garden of Zhou, back to the snowy temple in the plains, chatting with that young woman.

Soaking in the pleasure.

Merry and lively.

Happy.

And calm.

He even felt that, in the snow, Xu Yourong should be thinking the same.

Yes, Xu Yourong was also thinking this, but her thoughts were much clearer than this.

Xu Yourong did not think about a chess opponent or drinking partner. She went straight to that night in the snowy temple.

For this battle on the Bridge of Helplessness, he and she had prepared for an entire seven days.

More than three hundred sheets of paper filled with calculations and writing and seventeen star charts were in this foggy snow and misty rain, within these slashes of sword intent.

Right now, they were playing chess, having a talk, doing battle.

If they could continue in this way, it would naturally be great, but it was simply an impossibility.

The fallen snow had all crumbled, the fallen rain had all transformed, the surface of the stone bridge had been crushed into a spiderweb of cracks, and the Luo River below the bridge was covered with countless scales.

Both Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong had walked to the end of their respective paths.

The young woman's figure was still in the snow, extremely close to the center of the bridge, but her footsteps were now much heavier.

Chen Changsheng's swordplay had also changed, gradually becoming more sluggish. It was no longer as swift as it was at the

beginning, and even began to feel a little unpredictable.

The snow all fell, the fog suddenly dispersed, and the Bridge of Helplessness suddenly became clear and bright.

On the bridge, two figures met.

Like a chess game in its final stages, only the last two moves were left. Inevitably, victory and defeat would be decided.

Like a drinking party come to an end, small yellow flowers falling upon the scattered courses, incredibly somber and desolate.

In a blizzard, people would retreat to a temple, where only the ashes before the statues of gods still retained any warmth.

The white gauze fluttered. Xu Yourong's eyes were filled with sacred light, like the stars on the star compass.

Chen Changsheng seemed to lightly raise the sword, the point of the sword piercing through the snow that had begun to fall once more. The snow seemed just like the three hundred pieces of paper back at the Orthodox Academy in his room were dancing in the air.

Xu Yourong seemed to float up, like a god descending upon the world. With her sword imbued with light, she stabbed at Chen Changsheng.



Intellectual Sword, slash.

Temple sword, sever.

At this very moment, something happened that no one expected.

Chen Changsheng had originally been holding the hilt of his sword with both hands. Now, he released the grip of his left hand and extended it towards that temple sword which was flying through the snowy sky.

What did he want to do? Even if his body had been washed in dragon blood and was stronger than a body obtained from perfect Purification, it was still a body of flesh and blood. How could it resist the edge of the temple sword, let alone the temple sword that carried Xu Yourong's Heavenly Phoenix true essence and a boundless light? Even a powerful expert like Mao Qiuyu would not dare use a single hand to receive this strike!

Chen Changsheng's action was very casual, very natural, just like a hand reaching out to take a book from a bookshelf.

Of course, he wasn't relying on his left hand to block the temple sword.

He just wanted to create a connection to the temple sword.

Besides the light on the temple sword and the snowy air, the place his fingers extended towards also contained a faintly

discernible connection.

The temple sword had originally been a sword he had brought out of the Garden of Zhou!

He was extremely familiar with the temple sword's sword intent; how could the temple sword not recognize his Qi?

In the Garden of Zhou, the Sword Pool had reappeared and ten thousand old swords had followed him into the battle, the temple sword included. All of these swords were his companions, his fellow soldiers. In battle, how could a fellow soldier turn on another? In the moment of life and death, how could one's companions not hear one's cries for assistance?

An unimaginable ripple of Qi appeared on the Bridge of Helplessness!

In the air, the temple sword began to fiercely shudder and then flew towards Chen Changsheng.

Flew, not stabbed, because it had no hostility, much less killing intent!

The Sword of Great Light was abruptly dispelled!

Then something even more shocking occurred—Xu Yourong actually seemed to have already calculated this outcome!

Her right hand maintained its grip on the temple sword, using the energy to fly forward. Her white dress danced in the air, her figure blurred as she withdrew those myriad rays of light, and she arrived directly in front of Chen Changsheng. If Chen Changsheng had not, in the final moment, used his spiritual sense to stir the temple sword, then no matter how fast Xu Yourong's movement techniques were, she could not possibly have been so fast and broken through his Stainless Sword!

Chen Changsheng had calculated for seven days.

She had also calculated for seven days.

There was a squelch.

Perhaps it was because his control over the temple sword had come a little too late, or perhaps it was because Xu Yourong was still the Holy Maiden and even though she had only been reunited with the temple sword for seven days, her control over it was stronger than Chen Changsheng had imagined. Or perhaps it was because something happened that both sides had not expected.

The temple sword stabbed into Chen Changsheng's left arm, sending out a spurt of blood.

Then, the temple sword fell into his hands.

The wind and snow began to stir once more, whistling along as if

even the world was rather amazed.

For some reason, Chen Changsheng's actions became a little slow. The Stainless Sword in his right hand that had originally traced such fine and exquisite slashes began to deviate.

With an unhurried breeze, Xu Yourong extended her slim forefinger. With a seemingly slow, but actually incomparably fast speed, it thrust towards the space between Chen Changsheng's eyebrows.

If this were a normal finger, it would have been simply impossible for it to threaten Chen Changsheng's life. Although his body bathed in dragon blood could not resist the famous swords on the Tier of Legendary Weapons, that didn't mean its defense could be broken by a single slim forefinger. And yet, for some reason, his mind suddenly felt that he was in incredible danger, that even his life was on the verge of being lost.

Xu Yourong's fingertip held a speck of light, like that of a firefly, but stored within was a limitless energy.

No one could be faster than her finger.

At least in those battles of hers, no one other than Nanke was fast enough to catch up to the speed of this finger.

[The body lacks the wings of the bright-colored Phoenix](#), but our hearts are spiritually linked like the rhino and its horn.

(This is a line from an untitled poem by the Tang Dynasty poet Li Shangyin. The poem is romantic in nature, this line meaning that though the lovers cannot meet, as they do not have wings, their hearts are linked. In ancient China, there was a mythical three-horned rhino. One of these horns was called the "Heavenly Path Horn" which, if cut open, would reveal a white line that ran from the head to the tail of the rhino. The second part of this line is a reference to this myth.)

This was the Rhino Horn Finger!

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# Chapter 520 - Inseverable

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Successive cries of alarm rose up from the distant great ship on the Luo River.

With eyes wide, the people stared as Chen Changsheng extended his left hand and used some inexplicable method to easily break the Sword of Great Light. Then, they stared as Xu Yourong seemed to have already guessed this method and borrowed his method of breaking her technique in order to break his sword energy. Then, they stared as Chen Changsheng clearly held control over the temple sword, yet the temple sword still pierced into his body. Finally, they saw Xu Yourong extend her finger very inconspicuously towards Chen Changsheng, but in reality, sending it with the strength of a thunderbolt.

"Rhino Horn Finger!" Daoist Siyuan said with emotion.

Was Chen Changsheng about to lose? Would he die under this finger? Mao Qiuyu's expression abruptly changed, his two sleeves creating countless ripples as he prepared to rush over to the bridge. Tang Thirty-Six's complexion turned extremely ugly, and the same was true for Mo Yu and Prince Chen Liu. Did deciding victory and defeat really require deciding life and death as well?

All of this had happened too quickly.

No one could have thought that in such a brief span of time, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong could move from extreme movement to extreme stillness and then back to extreme movement again.

This signified the both of them had already fallen into their own respective tempos, but even more frightening was the fact that their tempos were actually very similar. This meant that it would be very challenging for anyone to break their tempos. Even those important figures whose cultivation far surpassed them could not accomplish this task.

Silence.

The light on the Bridge of Helplessness gradually scattered and faded away, like the light of the sun fading away to the darkness of the night.

The falling snow was still sparse, unable to hide their figures, nor fill the line drawn through the center of the bridge.

On one side of the line was snow, on the other side was still rain. Xu Yourong had already crossed this line and was standing in front of Chen Changsheng.

The forefinger of her right hand pressed towards the space between his eyebrows, but it had not been able to press all the way.

There was still the distance of a dagger between her finger and his forehead.

Because that dagger was between them.

At some point, Chen Changsheng had raised up the Stainless

Sword and blocked Xu Yourong's finger.

The body lacks the wings of the bright-colored Phoenix, but our hearts are spiritually linked like the rhino and its horn. But what if one were a bright-colored Phoenix as well?

Xu Yourong's Rhino Horn Finger was like a flash of lightning, but it was not faster than his sword. This could only mean that he had already calculated that she would use the Rhino Horn Finger at the end.

The temple sword had left a vivid wound on his left arm, and the edge of the wound was even speckled with things that seemed like fragments of stars, but the hilt of the temple sword was already grasped in his hands.

Xu Yourong slowly withdrew her finger.

A drop of golden red blood slowly seeped from her finger and then dripped onto the bridge. The rain and snow instantly evaporated into steam, creating a faint mist.

The Stainless Sword had blocked the Rhino Horn Finger, but it had not been able to completely dissipate all the might of that slender finger. A drop of blood also flowed from the space between Chen Changsheng's eyebrows, as if he had obtained a red birthmark.

A hush fell over the stone bridge.



The people on the distant ship in the Luo River realized that the situation was not as terrible as they had imagined and momentarily calmed down.

Separated by the faint mist, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong looked at each other, not speaking for a very long time.

They had both been injured, and it seemed that Chen Changsheng's injuries were somewhat more severe. However, both swords were in his hands. So just who had won?

It was very obvious that Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were no longer concerned about the final verdict. As they looked at each other, their minds gave birth to countless questions.

"Why is it that when I wrested control of the temple sword from you in the air and even had it slant to the right by seven inches, it still stabbed into my left arm in the end? Could it be that from the moment you began your Sword of Great Light, you never had any intention of injuring me, only of stabbing it into my left arm?"

"Why is it that your Stainless Sword, regarded as intelligent and elusive beyond compare, when given the huge opportunity to fall together with my Rhino Horn Finger and take us both down together, instead seemed to grow a little sluggish and through some inexplicable means, appeared in front of your eyebrows and blocked my finger?"

Seven days, seventeen star charts, three hundred sheets of paper,

countless calculations and deductions—the sum of the two's experience and knowledge in their cultivating lives were placed in this battle. They had already calculated every part of this battle to the finest detail, yet at the final moment, what was waiting for them was still a surprise.

Because they could calculate the path of the sword, calculate the time of day and location, but they could not calculate through the heart of another, could not calculate what the other was thinking.

Chen Changsheng could calculate for seven days and nights, yet he could not calculate...that Xu Yourong had actually calculated in advance that he would use sword intent to shake the temple sword, breaking the Sword of Great Light. He had not calculated that she would use the energy from this action to arrive in front of him. And most importantly, he had not calculated that Xu Yourong, from beginning to end, had been going easy on him, had not even a hint of killing intent towards him, and that even her thoughts of injuring him were rather weak. As a result, he had calculated the distance he should shake the temple sword incorrectly—the temple sword injuring him in the arm was truthfully a self-inflicted injury.

In this battle on the Bridge of Helplessness, Chen Changsheng had only wanted a draw, but he did not know that she only wanted to not lose. Similarly, Xu Yourong had also not imagined that he would be thinking this way, because she knew who he was, but he did not know who she was. As a result, there was simply no reason for him to shield her.

She believed that he wanted to win, so in the final moment, he

would inevitably take control of the temple sword and break her Sword of Great Light—in front of the Mausoleum of Zhou, she had seen a similar scene and knew he had the ability—so she had already made her preparations. The moment he would attempt to steal away the temple sword, she would use the opportunity to take control over the entire situation and ultimately announce in front of the countless people on the two banks of the Luo River that this battle was a draw. Yet she had not imagined that Chen Changsheng had no intention of using the temple sword to counterattack, only defend. The final path of the Stainless Sword was also for this purpose.

In brief, they had all thought up to the same point, but they had expected one point.

After countless calculations and plans met, they transformed into the unexpected.

What Xu Yourong had not expected was greater because she was sure that he did not know that she was that Lady Chujian, so she made more mistakes.

A mistake was a mistake. She had still not completely understood this youth called Chen Changsheng.

Compared to the person she got to know in the Garden of Zhou, compared to the person in her imagination, he seemed to be even better.

This was very good.

She lost very willingly.

"I lost."

If this battle were life-or-death, this battle could naturally continue. Her injuries were lighter than Chen Changsheng and she still had many techniques she had yet to display. But this was not a life-or-death battle, this was an exchange of swords. Now, both swords were in Chen Changsheng's hands, so she believed herself to have lost.

There was no sense of giving in. She very calmly accepted this fact.

Chen Changsheng found it impossible to be calm because there were too many things he didn't understand.

Upon hearing Xu Yourong's voice, it became even more impossible for him to calm down.

This voice was very pleasing to the ear, like the waters of a clear mountain stream, the dewdrops atop an autumn maple.

This voice was rather familiar, as if he had heard it somewhere before.

He turned to Xu Yourong, his gaze still kept out by the white

gauze.

But he still stared at the white gauze, his gaze growing increasingly serious, increasingly tense.

Even if the snowstorm stirred to life once more, even if the remnants of sword intent whistled by, his vision was inseverable.

His body abruptly became somewhat rigid, his voice rather nervous. "You...you...can you say that again?"

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# Chapter 521 - Mind Still In A Mess

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This was the first time after the beginning of this battle on the Bridge of Helplessness that the two had spoken.

It was also the first conversation between 'Chen Changsheng' and 'Xu Yourong'.

Xu Yourong had said, "I lost."

Chen Changsheng had said, "Can you say that again?"

If the person saying this had been Tang Thirty-Six, then these words would have assuredly been imbued with a derisive scorn intent on doing harm, and Xu Yourong would assuredly have used her Heavenly Phoenix true blood to burn this bridge to ashes. However, she knew of Chen Changsheng's temperament and knew that he had guessed upon something and was rather nervous. As a result, she was not angry, instead giving a silent smile.

The white gauze obscured her face and also her smile. It was only possible to vaguely feel the scent flowing through the air.

Suddenly, the wind and snow stirred and the white gauze hanging from Xu Yourong's curtained hat lifted up.

This battle had been crisscrossed by sword intent, especially from the frightening power of the Sword of Great Light. Her dress and hat had the protection of true essence, but the white gauze was not

so lucky.

The white gauze drifting in the breeze was cut apart and slowly drifted to the ground.

The misfortune of the white gauze was Chen Changsheng's fortune.

Because he finally saw her face.

It was a face beautiful beyond compare, an appearance like a painting, skin that seemed so tender that it could be broken by a gust of wind, so pale that it was whiter than snow.

She truly was very beautiful, beautiful enough to seize the morale of the entire army, to deprive the world of light.

But to Chen Changsheng, this face was a stranger's.

Just as he was assailed by regret, he saw her eyes.

It was a sublime pair of phoenix eyes, blazing with the radiance of countless stars, their beauty dazzling to the eyes.

However, he opened his own eyes wide and stared into hers, diving all the way into their deepest depths.

Here, there were no stars, no light, no divinity, no responsibility, only the bare mountain after a fresh rain.

At the moment, this pair of moving eyes contained many words, and much amusement as well.

He definitely recognized this pair of eyes. He could never forget this pair of eyes, and had believed that he would never be able to see these eyes again, until now, in this moment of tranquility after this battle of rain and snow on the Bridge of Helplessness, when the breeze brushed away the white gauze covering his opponent's face...

A while ago, as he sat in front of the Mausoleum of Zhou, he had vividly experienced what it meant for sorrow to surge forward like a tide.

Now, he finally understood that the phrase 'like being struck by a thunderbolt' written in books was not exaggerated, but a real sensation.

In the slightly gloomy snowy sky, an invisible thunderbolt seemed to form and directly strike him.

His body grew incomparably rigid and incapable of speech. The hands gripping the swords were ice-cold, but his body was blazing like an inferno.

With great difficulty, he dragged his eye away from hers. In an



incredibly stupid fashion, he turned around and stared upstream at the endless white sky and the waters of the Luo River.

After a while, he turned around and looked at her, opening his mouth as if ready to say something. In the end, however, nothing came out. With no other choice, he turned back to stare at the uninhabited upper reaches of the Luo River. He was worried that if he continued to look at her, his already faintly trembling legs might completely give out.

Seeing his awkward and comical appearance, the amusement in Xu Yourong's eyes intensified. She covered her mouth and chuckled, flowers blooming in her eyes.

She walked up to the edge of the bridge and stood at his side. Gazing upstream, she calmly asked, "Is there anything nice to see?"

"You...can you not say anything to me right now? I'm in a bit of a mess at the moment."

Chen Changsheng's face was a little red. This wasn't because of the lingering power of the Rhino Horn Finger, nor was it because of the cold weather, but because he was nervous.

As he gazed at the Luo River and smelled the faint fragrance coming from his side, he felt flustered and didn't even dare glance to his side.

Before the match, he had also been very nervous, so he had

looked under the bridge at the snow falling into the Luo River. By seeing the moving and unmoving unite as one, he was able to calm his mind.

But now, no matter how he looked at the snow falling into the Luo River, he found it impossible to calm down.

Xu Yourong gently pushed her hair behind her ear. Gazing at his profile and not wishing for him to be too hard-pressed, she withdrew her smile and calmly asked, "With your last technique, why did you not act according to position of the Three Stars Constellation like you did at the very beginning, but instead suddenly brought your sword level with your brow?"

As expected, when discussing swords, Chen Changsheng calmed down a little. He mumbled, "I guessed."

When Su Li had passed the Intellectual Sword down to him, he said it very clearly, there are many times where one just has to guess. This statement seemed rather unreasonable, but with her talent, Xu Yourong could naturally understand. Originally, she had not planned to tease him, but she couldn't help herself, "Then why haven't you been able to guess who I am?"

She spoke very calmly, but if one listened carefully, there was a faint meaning within.

Chen Changsheng had already gone stupid. His head lowered, he found it simply impossible to speak.

Xu Yourong said nothing more. Quietly standing at his side, she watched as the snow fell into the Luo River.

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From the moment the battle started, the two banks of the Luo River were filled with cheers and commentary that reached to the skies. When the fog of snow met with the mist of rain and the temple sword and Stainless Sword burst forth with the brightest colors, the cheers and commentary reached their peak. The common people could not understand this match, but the awe-inspiring scene on the Bridge of Helplessness was already enough to move them.

This battle that had been the focus of all had finally concluded, but the cheers and commentary continued because the common people could not tell just who had obtained the final victory.

"In my view, it should be Little Principal Chen. In the end, didn't the Holy Maiden back down first?"

"Both of them were injured, and Little Principal Chen's injuries are heavier. For what reason can you say the Holy Maiden lost?"

"But can't you see that in the end, both of the swords are in Little Principal Chen's hands?"

"And what does that mean? The Holy Maiden didn't even use her strongest techniques. Did you see the legendary Phoenix blood, huh?"

"Don't tell me you can confirm that Little Principal Chen used his full strength?"

From the front of the river bank quickly came the news that Xu Yourong had conceded to Chen Changsheng's sword.

The two banks of the Luo River were momentarily peaceful as the crowd gradually digested this fact.

"Eh...quickly, look at the bridge!"

Countless gazes shifted to the distant Bridge of Helplessness and saw Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong standing side by side at that place. They even seemed to be softly chatting about something. After a moment, they stopped talking and calmly stood there, letting the drifting snow fall upon them. Because they were rather far from the crowd, they looked almost like they were leaning against each other.

The noise of discussion on the two banks of the Luo River gradually faded away, leaving only an eerie silence. The crowd stared at the scene on the Bridge of Helplessness with quite some astonishment. Just a moment ago, they were wielding swords and fighting each other, and now they were standing side by side and viewing the scenery? What was going on here?

"The Holy Maiden...this was showing mercy, huh?"

Amongst the common people spectating, very few supported Chen Changsheng, and even these people remained silent, because they could see that this battle had been marvelous beyond compare, but it was very obvious that neither side had intentions of making it one of life-or-death. The crowds could not understand those wondrous sword techniques displayed in the rain and snow, but now when they saw the scene on the bridge, they faintly sensed a certain implication within.

The scene on the Bridge of Helplessness was very beautiful. Standing together, they were so harmonious, so calm, that the crowd could not bear to break it by making some noise. Only after a very long time had passed did the crowds on both banks of the Luo River gradually begin to sigh, each one of them having the same meaning.

"Why must such a pair of immortal companions point their swords at each other?"

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## Chapter 522 - Acting Like A Fool

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The people on the ship were even more confused than the crowd on the banks of the Luo River.

The match had already been concluded for some time, but neither Chen Changsheng nor Xu Yourong had descended from the Bridge of Helplessness. Instead, they stood calmly at Chen Changsheng's end of the bridge, looking at something or the other.

None of the important figures like Mao Qiuyu or Linghai Zhiwang or even Xu Shiji believed that Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong knew each other. Moreover, they were keenly aware of the significance hidden behind this battle, so they did not believe that Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong would begin to sympathize with each other through this exchange of swords. So just why, after this battle had just concluded, were they so calmly standing next to each other? And why were they so close? What were they doing?

"Just what's going on here?" Tang Thirty-Six said as he looked at the backs of those two people on the bridge.

Mo Yu felt the same, and when she associated it with that night Xu Yourong visited the Orthodox Academy, the more she thought, the more she felt something was wrong, causing her to crease her brow.

Tang Thirty-Six said in aggravation, "I don't care if they feign loneliness or mimic despair, but can they care a little about the

mood of us spectators?"

On the side, Su Moyu asked, "What mood?"

Tang Thirty-Six pointed towards the Bridge of Helplessness at Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong, explaining, "They just fought such a fierce battle and both are clearly wounded. At this time, under the eyes of so many people, they're actually still in the mood to appreciate the snow? You don't feel that this is too...that thing?"

'That thing' was an obscene word.

The crowds on the banks of the Luo River and the people on the ship might have different moods, but none of them were thinking about curses like Tang Thirty-Six was.

Because the scene on the Bridge of Helplessness at the moment truly was very beautiful.

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Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong stood on his side of the bridge, their backs to the great ship and the numberless crowds on the banks of the Luo River as if they didn't exist in this world.

After quite some time had passed, Chen Changsheng raised his

head and looked at her, saying, "You..."

Xu Yourong did not look back, continuing to gaze at the upper reaches of the Luo River. She calmly replied, "Do not speak."

Somewhat hesitant, Chen Changsheng said, "Then I..."

Xu Yourong raised her brows, saying, "Didn't I say to not speak?"

Chen Changsheng lowered his head. "Oh."

Xu Yourong gazed at a snowflake drifting down in front of her. "Don't speak of our matter to anyone else."

Didn't you tell me not to speak? Chen Changsheng only dared to think this sentence, and then upon thinking about her request, he became rather confused.

"Eh?"

Xu Yourong suddenly asked, "Happy?"

Chen Changsheng very obediently replied, "Mm."

Xu Yourong turned her head to him, then smiled, "Truly silly."

Chen Changsheng scratched his head, then said, "Ah."



"I'll leave first," Xu Yourong declared.

Somewhat surprised, Chen Changsheng said anxiously, "Ah?"

Xu Yourong extended her hand and received the temple sword, then walked back to her side of the bridge.

Chen Changsheng watched as her body gradually disappeared into the snow, completely at a loss as to how to respond.

He once more felt that feeling he had felt several days ago in front of the Mausoleum of Zhou.

Countless emotions seemed to assail him like a tide.

This time, the tide contained no sorrow, but was complex to the extreme.

He stood muddleheaded on the Bridge of Helplessness. As he watched the White Crane fly off, he suddenly saw that pheasant-like young Peng.

In the wind and snow, the young Peng twisted its head to glance, seeming very much like it was jeering at him.

He turned his head back to gaze once more at the Luo River. Leaning against the guardrail, he lowered his head.

He didn't use his hands to cover his face. He knew that his face was burning hot at the moment.

The other reason he didn't use his hand to cover his face was the small slip of paper in his hand.

This small slip of paper had been secretly stuffed into his hand by Xu Yourong when she was taking the temple sword.

In the Six Ivies, and in the private schools and provincial academies in the counties, provinces, and countryside, when the spring sunshine outside the window was bright and lovely, small slips of paper would always be passed around between desks.

This small slip of paper was like a ray of spring sunshine.

Today, in the company of the wind and snow, before the numerous populace of the capital, he had also received a small slip of paper.

On the paper was written a location and a time.

Fortune Peace Road's Fish with Tofu.

Today, at dusk.

This was the first time Chen Changsheng had received this sort

of slip of paper.

He recalled those stories of gifted scholars and beautiful ladies that he had once read and the guidance Tang Thirty-Six had provided in his everyday life. Rather unconvinced, he thought, is this what is meant by a 'date'?

The wind and snow were as before, but the Bridge of Helplessness gradually began to grow livelier.

Xu Yourong had conceded and then departed. This battle which everyone had been engrossed in had finally come to a close.

Moreover, without mentioning what sort of variable this battle on the Bridge of Helplessness would present towards the conflict between the Li Palace and the Imperial Court, this battle would inevitably be recorded in the annals of history, becoming the first battle between the future Pope and the Holy Maiden. Then, it would be brought up countless times by other people, like now, for instance. At the moment, many people wished to know the details of this battle.

Especially Tang Thirty-Six.

He cared nothing for the indications of the Orthodoxy cavalry and Imperial Guards. Transforming into a puff of smoke, he ran to the Bridge of Helplessness. Gasping for breath, he looked at Chen Changsheng and asked, "Just who exactly won?"

At the moment, Chen Changsheng was still somewhat in a daze. Hearing his question, he inadvertently replied, "She did not lose."

"I reminded you before, don't go easy on her just because she looks pretty! And now would you look at it, you didn't go easy, but your mouth is playing these games! She didn't lose, so does that mean that you lost? Xu Yourong has already admitted that she lost and you still want to trick me!" Tang Thirty-Six said angrily.

Chen Changsheng was rather confused at why he was so angry, thinking, even if this is the case, as my friend, shouldn't you be happy for me?

"Since you could beat her, just what was all that before the match about telling me to bet on you losing? Just what do you mean?"

As Tang Thirty-Six thought about this matter, he became absolutely apoplectic. "You are a pig!"

Chen Changsheng recalled this matter and then he recalled many other things. Feeling quite ashamed, he admitted, "Yes, I am a pig."

Tang Thirty-Six was stunned. Only now did he realize that there was something wrong, that Chen Changsheng seemed like he was in another world.

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Under the gaze of the countless crowds of the capital and cheers coming from both sides of the street, Chen Changsheng's group returned to the Orthodox Academy.

The restaurants outside the academy walls hung high their colored lanterns and random zither tunes could be heard. Because of their pride and joy at their principal's victory, the students and teachers of the Orthodox Academy were there, celebrating to their heart's content.

After returning to his room, Chen Changsheng did not emerge for a very long time.

Tang Thirty-Six, Su Moyu, and Xuanyuan Po stood around the first floor, looking up at the third floor window, their faces filled with doubt.

Chen Changsheng had ultimately obtained victory in this match that was the focus of the entire world's attention, and he had won in such a beautiful fashion, with no place that he could be criticized. But why was it that very few of the emotions a victor should feel could be seen on his face? Even if he once had an engagement with Xu Yourong, he might feel somewhat complex about it, but to this extent?

Just what had happened on the Bridge of Helplessness? What problem had Chen Changsheng encountered?

"To make a person obsessed with cleanliness admit that they're a

pig..."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the window, his expression grave.  
"This matter does not seem very simple at all."

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## Chapter 523 - A Date After Dusk

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Zhexiu, supported by his walking stick, walked out of the house. Looking at the other three people, he said, "If you want to know, just ask him."

Tang Thirty-Six shook his head, "I asked before, but he didn't say. In addition, given his response at the time, he probably wouldn't say it even if you beat him to death."

Xuanyuan Po felt his head ache. He asked, "In your view, just what do you think is most likely to have happened?"

Tang Thirty-Six speculated, "I wonder if he was prepared to let Xu Yourong win at the beginning and so made me bet on him losing. In the end though, he wasn't careful for a few moments and won, which is why he's acting so weird now..."

Su Moyu shook his head, "Even if this matter deviated from his calculations, it's not enough to reach this state."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "You don't understand, my meaning is that it's very likely he took all his wealth and bet...on his own loss."

They were all silent. After a while, Xuanyuan Po finally understood and sucked in a cold breath before asking, "Then wasn't Chen Changsheng faking the fight?"

Zhexiu, seeing that their conversation was getting increasingly nonsensical, shook his head and departed, no longer paying any mind to this matter.

Su Moyu helplessly said, "In my view, Chen Changsheng is just someone who wishes to cultivate the Dao and is able to keep something like winning or losing from resting on his mind. You're all overthinking it."

Xuanyuan Po thought it over, then shook his head, "That's completely at odds with his appearance in the carriage, sometimes giggling to himself and sometimes creasing his brow."

Tang Thirty-Six sneered, "If even a black bear can see it, then he really must have a problem."

Suddenly, a shout came out of the third-floor window.

He hadn't encountered some enemy, nor was it a cockroach. Rather, he was giving vent to his feelings.

"See...if it wasn't because he lost so much money, how could he be in such pain? Have you ever seen his emotions fluctuate like this before?"

Gazing at the third-floor window, Tang Thirty-Six sighed.

But in the next moment, the yells coming from the room transformed into the hums of a song. One could faintly make out



that this was a rather obscure and rustic song.

Su Moyu looked at Tang Thirty-Six and asked, "Do you still think his mood is bad?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "I didn't say that this was a problem of whether his mood is good or bad, but that his mood is fluctuating."

Su Moyu contemplated and realized that Tang Thirty-Six's words were reasonable.

Amongst the people of the Orthodox Academy, in terms of controlling emotion, it was naturally Wofu Zhexiu that was strongest, and the second strongest was Chen Changsheng. Whether it was in his normal everyday life or when cultivating and fighting, Chen Changsheng had never showed any sign of losing control over his emotions. He was calm and unflustered far beyond his age, even giving off the feeling that he had already experienced all sorts of things.

However, today's Chen Changsheng was clearly different.

"Have you guys heard the story of Peddler Jin passing the provincial exam?" Tang Thirty-Six looked up at the window and narrowed his eyes. "If my previous conjecture is wrong, then it's highly likely that he got too excessively happy from winning against Xu Yourong and went insane."

Right then, the third-floor window was suddenly pushed open

and Chen Changsheng peeked his head out and looked down.

Tang Thirty-Six and the rest were all quite startled and hurriedly lowered their heads. They began to randomly mumble things at each other, pretending to chat so as to avoid Chen Changsheng noticing anything strange.

Chen Changsheng had no clue that his fellows of the Orthodox Academy were worrying about his mental state. He yelled, "Tang Tang, come upstairs and help me with something."

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"What do you need?"

"Help me see what clothes would be more appropriate." Chen Changsheng pointed at the wardrobe at those clean and tidy shirts that still looked brand-new after a year. He added, "Mm...it's also not too formal an occasion, I just don't want to seem lacking in manners."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the ten-odd plain sets of clothing in the wardrobe and said rather helplessly, "Just who do you think can tell the difference between these clothes?"

Just as Xu Yourong had felt when she visited the Orthodox Academy in the night, Chen Changsheng's clothes were always of

this type, always this plain. Besides being clean, there was nothing special about them.

Chen Changsheng saw that this was true. After considering his options for a moment, he asked, "What if you let me borrow some of your clothes?"

"Has the Moon of the demons really run over to the capital?"

Tang Thirty-Six looked like he had just heard something inconceivable. He stared into Chen Changsheng's eyes for a very long time. Finally, in a voice filled with disbelief, he said, "To a normal person, a celebratory feast at the Li Palace is naturally important, but you can enter the Li Palace whenever you want. Is there any need to place such importance on it?"

Chen Changsheng stared blankly at him. It was only at this point that he remembered that there was a feast being held at the Li Palace tonight...the battle on the Bridge of Helplessness had received the attention of the world. As the Principal of the Orthodox Academy and also tacitly recognized as the successor to the Orthodoxy, since he had obtained victory over Xu Yourong, who represented the Tianhai Divine Empress and the southern sects, his attendance at this feast was naturally unavoidable.

"In a little while, I have to go out to do something...you and Su Moyu go in my place to the Li Palace. I might have to trouble you to explain to His Holiness."

Tang Thirty-Six was incredibly shocked, thinking, just what's

more important than tonight? His Holiness is extremely likely to use this feast to announce a few things.

"What are you going to do?"

"I really can't tell you."

Tang Thirty-Six no longer pursued the topic. Walking to the window, he held his hands behind his back and looked out at the ice-covered lake. Very casually, he asked, "Where should the academy's carriage go to pick you up?"

These two were far too familiar with each other. Chen Changsheng knew very well what Tang Thirty-Six was up to, but he knew that if he asked, Tang Thirty-Six would just reply that cold nights and icy roads aren't good to walk on.

"I'm not going to tell you the location, and don't you think about following me either."

He looked at Tang Thirty-Six's back and said, "This is my matter, let me handle it."

Without turning around, Tang Thirty-Six asked, "And you're sure you can handle it properly?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "I'm not sure, but I hope I can."

Saying this, he changed into a plain long gown that he wore the most often, glanced at the bamboo dragonfly on the bookshelf, and exited the room.

Standing by the window, Tang Thirty-Six watched as Chen Changsheng walked out of the house and walked into the wintry forest by the lake. After a while, he saw him jump over the wall and then vanish from sight. He couldn't help but crease his brow, thinking, acting with such prudence and keeping your tracks so hidden, just what are you going to do?

Walking through the cold and snowy forest then jumping over the wall, he put on a bamboo hat and merged with the crowd. He began walking in the direction of the gloomy sun in the snowy clouds. He didn't need to walk too long before arriving at a very ordinary alley in the west of the city. The alley was very short but its location was excellent. Nearby was the Li Palace, so this alley contained many restaurants and taverns.

This was the Fortune Peace Road that was written on the slip of paper.

Chen Changsheng stood at the entrance to the alley. He lowered his head to take a look at himself. After confirming that everything was very proper, he relaxed a little.

He wore a very ordinary set of clothes, but they were washed very clean. Back at the Orthodox Academy, he had also washed himself very clean.

On the Bridge of Helplessness, her finger had left a drop of blood on his forehead, but just like he had confirmed after leaving the Garden of Zhou, his blood currently had no scent. After bathing himself three times in succession, there was even less scent left behind. Only the fresh, clean, and faint scent of soap could be smelled on his body.

His black hair was bound very tightly. It was somewhat damp and not completely dry. In the cold wind emerging from the alley, the surface of his hair had been covered by a thin layer of frost.

This was just like his current mood.

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# Chapter 524 - Raise Your Hand To Ask For Leave

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Chen Changsheng walked into the alley. After a few moments, he walked out again. He stood at the entrance of the alley, seeming rather lost. He had walked through the alley two times and seen many restaurants, but he had seen nothing like the ‘Fish with Tofu’ written on the slip of paper.

Then should he just wait for her to come? He stood at the entrance of the alley, then was struck by a sudden thought. Could it be that to punish his stupidity, she had deliberately played a trick on him? Yes, that must be it, or else why would she leave on this slip of paper a location that didn't exist?

His emotions were rather complex. The snowflakes descending from the heavens gradually grew larger and the pedestrians on the street and in the alley gradually left to avoid the snow. Because of the feast today at the Li Palace, many people had gone off to the Divine Avenue to see the excitement. Business for the restaurants and taverns within Fortune Peace Road was much worse than normal, and they seemed at the moment rather cold and cheerless.

He did not leave, instead waiting in the falling snow by the alley's entrance.

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The two sides of the Li Palace's Divine Avenue were illuminated by bright lanterns. As the snowflakes drifted down, the people of the capital that had come to watch the spectacle had decreased somewhat. Those who persisted, when seeing the line of luxurious imperial carriages of the aristocratic houses and various palaces entering the Li Palace, felt that this journey had not been made in vain. Tonight, the Great Hall of Light where the feast was being held was already filled with priests and ministers, as well as the people from the various academies and halls. However, that quiet and beautiful hall behind the Great Hall of Light was still as tranquil as usual.

The Pope was attending tonight's feast. He had already exchanged his hempen robe for the Divine Robe. His right hand held a ladle and he was currently watering his Green Leaf. Seeing that the Green Leaf was growing stronger and sturdier, his elderly face revealed a gratified smile. He took a soft towel that had been placed by the pot and gently dried his hands.

On the previous times Chen Changsheng had come to the Li Palace, he had noticed the changes of the Green Leaf. Since the Green Leaf World and the Garden of Zhou were the same in that both were stable shards of space and were impossible to make larger, he did not understand why the Pope paid so much care for its growth. Could it just be so that the gate to enter the Green Leaf World would be more stable? Or was it because as the Green Leaf in the pot grew stronger and healthier, the gate between the Green Leaf World and the original world would get larger and larger? If this was the case, why did the Pope want the gate to the Green Leaf World to get larger?



"In the end, this matter is still too great. Does Your Holiness not wish to consider it a bit longer?"

Mao Qiuyu calmly stood behind the Pope, his attitude very reverential, his two sleeves not trembling in the slightest.

The Pope placed down the towel and smiled, "Upon hearing your narrative of the battle on the Bridge of Helplessness, I realized that this child is more reliable than I imagined. You also said before, solely in terms of potential and future prospects, it's really quite difficult to find a better person than him. This being the case, if I pass on the Orthodoxy to him, I can be at ease."

Mao Qiuyu was quiet for a while, before replying, "Your Holiness's words are true. It's just that Linghai and Siyuan are both well above Chen Changsheng in terms of cultivation and qualifications, and back then, those two also received Your Holiness's devoted care and nurturing. In my view, those two will find it very difficult to accept this affair."

The Pope walked back to the dais, took down the Divine Crown from the glazed throne, and placed it on his head. However, he did not grasp the Divine Staff which represented the power of the Orthodoxy. In an unhurried tone, he said, "Just count it as me being selfish. After all, this child is the only legitimate successor to the Orthodoxy. Moreover, in the future, he will have to confront this world's most difficult choice, most frustrating helplessness, most penetrating sorrow. This bestowal is just my consolation to him and also the compensation the Orthodoxy should be giving to him."

Saying this, he slowly turned and began to walk towards that cold, stone wall. As he walked, the stone wall slowly opened, unleashing boundless light.

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This was a Night Pearl that had originally sat on the edge of the Dew Platform, illuminating the capital. Due to the weathering of time, it had gradually lost its shine, so it had been taken down and placed in one of the halls of the Imperial Palace to serve as a light source. Although this Night Pearl was no longer as dazzling as it was in the very beginning, to the memorials on the desk, it was still incomparably bright.

The Divine Empress was currently perusing memorials, at the same time listening to the words echoing through the palace hall.

The elderly chief eunuch, his body bowed, stood to her right, very softly relaying to her the specific details of this morning's battle on the Bridge of Helplessness.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong's battle on the Bridge of Helplessness had taken place not long after the early morning, yet both the Pope and the Divine Empress did not have people report to them on this matter until it was almost nightfall. This indicated that, unlike the view of the entire continent, these two Saints didn't much care about this battle. Even though Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were their most trusted juniors and were even

their successors from a certain point of view, this was still, in their eyes, a trifling matter.

"...as the temple sword came from the Sword Pool. Little Principal Chen presumably left some sort of trick. The Holy Maiden was probably clear on this beforehand and so had made her preparations. Yet for some reason, still not attacking his opponent, Chen Changsheng wounded his left arm as a price to forcefully wrest control of the temple sword. Then, once more against expectations, he blocked the Holy Maiden's Rhino Horn Finger. If just discussing an exchange of swords, he can be considered to have won by half a technique, but if this were a real battle and it continued, he would probably have had no chance of victory. It's just...the Holy Maiden straightforwardly left in that manner."

After saying his piece, the chief eunuch carefully raised his head up and glanced at her, then slowly retreated.

The Divine Empress's expression had not changed. This was the case even during the vast majority of the time when the chief eunuch was not raising his head. The talent and intellect that Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong had displayed in the battle on the Bridge of Helplessness was sufficient to shock the vast majority of the people, but not her. Only when she heard that Xu Yourong had comprehended the Sword of Great Light did she arch her brows, seemingly quite surprised at this.

"Truly a stubborn girl."

She threw the memorial onto the desk, stood up and walked to

the doors of the hall. Her hands clasped behind her, she gazed at the distant light in the darkness. That place was most likely the Li Palace.

Suddenly, Mo Yu rushed in, her expression incredibly grave. She reported that matter which had just occurred to the Divine Empress.

Quietly gazing at the Li Palace, the Divine Empress smirked, but her eyes were still indifferent. "It's getting more and more interesting."

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The battle on the Bridge of Helplessness had already concluded, but the discussion brought about by its aftermath could not be so easily quieted in such a short amount of time. The conversations held between the important figures in the Great Hall of Light were still mostly concerned with this matter. With the insight and cultivation of these important figures, after they had calmed down, they were able to recall the scene and understand that Xu Yourong had refrained from using her Heavenly Phoenix true blood to intentionally suppress herself to the level of a normal person. This was because she wanted to engage in a straightforward confrontation, relying on her strength, not innate talent, to obtain victory over Chen Changsheng. However, in no way did this mean that they believed Chen Changsheng had an unfair advantage, because they were also keenly aware that Chen Changsheng had also not used his most powerful techniques—for

instance, that method he had used to receive Zhu Luo's strike in that battle amidst the rain in Xunyang City and not die.

Suddenly, solemn and compassionate music began to play throughout the Great Hall of Light. The stone wall in the depths of the hall began to slowly open and emit rays of light, and stone sculptures on both sides of the great hall began to glow with light. The people in the hall hurriedly tidied their clothes and arranged themselves in order, humbly bowing towards the Pope as he emerged from the stone wall and walked into the light.

Under the escort of the head knights and several archbishops, the Pope slowly ascended the dais. Daoist Siyuan and Linghai Zhiwang were naturally amongst them, and Mao Qiuyu, Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons, was in the very back. What surprised everyone the most was that the Divine Staff, the symbol of the Orthodoxy's authority, was clasped between his hands.

Without any long or complicated procedures, Mao Qiuyu calmly began to read aloud the merit Chen Changsheng had performed for the Orthodox Academy. From the Grand Examination to the Mausoleum of Books, from the Garden of Zhou to this morning on the Bridge of Helplessness, and even the rebirth of the Orthodox Academy—this originally taboo matter of the Orthodoxy—had been listed as his achievements.

This had always been a celebratory feast for the Orthodoxy, and of course, what they celebrated were Chen Changsheng's achievements. Mao Qiuyu announcing these achievements was something that everyone had expected, but what happened afterwards was something no one, with the exception of Mao

Qiuyu and the Pope, had anticipated.

After Mao Qiuyu finished reading off Chen Changsheng's merits, he did not act as people thought he would and directly announce the reward the Orthodoxy would bestow upon him. Instead, he calmly walked to the Pope's side and then, under the shocked gazes of all, the Pope extended his hand and took up the Divine Staff, declaring, "Thereby, we grant this blessing unto him."

The Great Hall of Light was completely silent. No one spoke because they were all stupefied.

At present, Chen Changsheng was the Principal of the Orthodox Academy. From quite a long time ago, he had been the Pope's martial nephew, it was just that nobody knew of this fact. After the events of the Mausoleum of Books, the entire continent knew of the Pope's plans, knew that Chen Changsheng would become the next Pope. However, this had all been conjecture or inference.

Today, conjectures had been confirmed, inferences had become reality.

The Pope had turned over the Divine Staff that symbolized the authority of the Orthodoxy to Chen Changsheng. This was also a declaration to the entire world that Chen Changsheng was his successor.

The silence in the Great Hall of Light continued. It wasn't because of some strangeness nor was it indicative that some momentous event would occur—no one would dare defy the will of

the Pope in this place—it was just that nobody knew how to respond. This was something proper and expected, it had just occurred far earlier than imagined and they couldn't help but be shocked.

Chen Changsheng was only sixteen.

Daoist Siyuan and Linghai Zhiwang, those two who were once regarded as having the highest hopes of taking up the Divine Staff and succeeding the Pope, had incredibly unsightly complexions. They had originally believed that they still had ten-some years to change the Pope's will, but they had not expected that the Pope would not give them any time whatsoever.

They were keenly aware of just why the Pope had chosen this time to confirm Chen Changsheng's status as successor.

If this were before, the new faction of the Orthodoxy, such as the two archbishops and their supporters, might be able to use the reason of Chen Changsheng being too young and requiring further observation as an excuse for a few years, thus delaying the Pope's decision. But now, the continent already had a sixteen-year-old Holy Maiden; what did it matter if there was a sixteen-year-old candidate for Pope?

Let alone the fact that this candidate for Pope had just defeated that Holy Maiden today.

The silence in the great hall continued, but people gradually began to feel that something was wrong. Even if they didn't know

how to react, what of Chen Changsheng?

Even if he was also very shocked, at this point, he should still stand up and thank the Pope for this blessing, then accept the well-wishes of everyone within the hall.

Mao Qiuyu's gaze looked over the hall. His brow deeply furrowed, he asked somewhat incredulously, "Where is Chen Changsheng?"

In a certain corner of the great hall, a hand shot up from the crowd, accompanied by a rather uneasy voice.

"He...he...he...at lunch, he was too happy and ate too much. He had some indigestion, so he entrusted me with the task...of asking for leave."

Tonight, the Orthodoxy was celebrating achievements, the Pope had come to personally bestow the Divine Staff and confirm the position of successor to the Orthodoxy...but the person in question was not even here?

The Great Hall of Light exploded with discussion and the crowd parted like water, revealing the person that had just been speaking.

Tang Thirty-Six, his head lowered, his hand raised.

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# Chapter 525 - Sharing The Umbrella Like Old Friends, No?

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Tang Thirty-Six's raised hand was very low, as was his head, and his voice was truthfully also very low.

Although his face was not visible, it could be imagined just how embarrassed he was.

The crowd parted like a tide. No matter how embarrassed he was, given that he was widely regarded as Chen Changsheng's good friend and also the fact that he was the superintendent of the Orthodox Academy, and then adding on the fact that Su Moyu and Xuanyuan Po persistently turned their heads away, Tang Thirty-Six could only walk forward, all the way until he reached the Pope.

Mao Qiuyu had a rather unsightly expression. Only through sheer will did he resist the urge to discipline him with a word or two.

On the other hand, the Pope had a very calm expression as he passed the Divine Staff into Tang Thirty-Six's hands.

The Divine Staff was not as heavy as imagined, but Tang Thirty-

Six felt it was as heavy as a mountain, so heavy that he almost couldn't bear it. Getting on his knees, he bowed in Chen Changsheng's place.

His head was lowered, but he could still sense the gazes being focused on him from all around. Some of these gazes were stunned, some disdainful, others gratified, but even more were surprisingly hostile, sharp like swords.

He felt himself incredibly unfortunate and thus incredibly angry. Under Mao Qiuyu's direction, he said a few words of gratitude, but his heart was filled with nothing but incessant curses.

These curses were naturally aimed at the person who had left him with this task and then run off to parts unknown, Chen Changsheng.

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The snow was falling harder and harder, and the streets had long since become devoid of pedestrians. Within the alley, lanterns were continuously being lit.

Chen Changsheng had already stood for a very long time in front of Fortune Peace Road, gazing at the sky while sighing in his heart.

The snow clouds obscured the sun and the capital was somewhat

gloomy. One could barely tell from the intensity of the light that the sun was currently moving west, on the verge of sinking below the horizon.

The time on the slip of paper had said dusk, but the world in dusk had always been somewhat fuzzy. The idea of dusk itself was rather fuzzy. It would always take at least an hour from the moment the sun began to sink below the mountains until the moment it completely sank below the horizon, so then was it still dusk right now?

Did he perhaps come a little too early? Or would she really not come?

He thought, if the sky has gone completely dark and she still hasn't come, I guess I'll leave.

Suddenly, a loud sound came from the distance, from the direction of the Li Palace. He simply had no idea what had occurred, much less that the matter had to do with him. In the snowstorm, he rubbed his hands, at times looking in the direction of the Imperial Palace, at times looking in the direction of the Divine General of the East's estate.

There was a problem with his meridians and their output of true essence was insufficient, but his body was truthfully brimming with true essence, so he had no need to fear the cold. The reason he was rubbing his hands and occasionally stamping his feet was purely a problem with his mood.

The sky gradually darkened and would soon turn completely black. He had also abandoned all hope.

From a distance, a voice rang out from behind him.

"Why are you standing here?"

Upon hearing this voice, his body slightly stiffened. Turning his body, he saw a person holding an umbrella slowly walking out of the alley behind him.

The umbrella was somewhat old and seemingly rather strange. The space under the umbrella seemed to be cut off from the dusky light and was very difficult to make out clearly, even impossible for the average person to see.

But Chen Changsheng could, because he was very familiar with this umbrella. This umbrella was originally his. Of course, this umbrella was the Yellow Paper Umbrella.

Just like a snowflake drifting down from the sky, the Yellow Paper Umbrella slowly made its way over to him, then tilted back, revealing Xu Yourong's face.

It was an appearance very difficult to describe with words. One could only rely on the cliché of describing it as perfect.

Seeing this sublimely beautiful face that truly was unfamiliar to him, Chen Changsheng was rather nervous, rather absent-minded.

Only after gazing into her eyes and finding that familiar sense of tranquil indifference was he able to gradually relax.

He was familiar with her voice and also familiar with her eyes. The moment their gazes met, all unfamiliarity melted away and it seemed as if the two had returned to the Garden of Zhou.

[Journeying together in life and death](#), accompanying each other morning and night, sitting to discuss the Dao, rising to confront the enemy, meeting each other for the first time like old friends, white-headed and growing old.

(This seems to be a play on the Chinese idiom "白头如新, 倾盖如故", which carries the meaning of "some people can know each other until they grow old and still treat each other as strangers, while some people can stop their carriages and meet each other for the first time yet chat like they were old friends." 白头 means white-haired. 倾盖 means the overlapping canopies of carriages. In this case though, the idiom is changed to "倾盖如故, 白首到老", which we can take to mean meeting like old friends and then growing old together.)

Sharing the umbrella just like they were old friends.

But what reason was there to say they were white-headed?

Chen Changsheng realized that he had suddenly thought of this term and grew rather embarrassed.

At the moment, he did not know there was someone in the Li Palace that was even more embarrassed than he was.

"Why are you standing here? Didn't we already agree to go eat Tofu and Fish?"

Xu Yourong's demeanor was quite unlike Chen Changsheng's current nervous state, as she had known who he was for quite some time and several dozen days had been enough for her to calm down. Moreover, they had touched far too many times in the Garden of Zhou. When she saw him, it was really impossible for her to feel an unfamiliarity, much less display any feeling of distance.

"...I already went into the alley and looked over it twice, but I couldn't find this 'Fish with Tofu' that you spoke of," Chen Changsheng replied.

Xu Yourong was stumped for words. Turning to the alley, she said with regret, "I don't come back for three years and it just goes away like that. That place's fish really was quite good."

"How did you...come from that direction?" Chen Changsheng asked, pointing at the alley from which she had emerged.

That alley was not coming from the Imperial Palace, nor was it from the direction of the Divine General of the East's estate, so he had not noticed her coming.

"I went to the Little Orange Garden and waited for a while. Mo Yu...did not come back, then I decided to head over and arrived a little late."

As she spoke, Xu Yourong's two eyelashes fluttered, her eyes turned down, and her cheeks blushed.

As she had been making her way to the appointed place, she suddenly recalled that this was the first time she and Chen Changsheng would...privately meet. The time in the Garden of Zhou naturally could not be counted, and she suddenly felt somewhat shy. She then recalled that it was she who on the Bridge of Helplessness had set this appointment and, not wanting to give off a bad impression, came up with the idea on the spot to bring Mo Yu along.

Who could have known that Mo Yu was not home?

She didn't know if she should regret this or celebrate it.

In short, to her, these matters were even more complex than comprehending the Heavenly Tome Monoliths.

The light was too gloomy so Chen Changsheng could not see her expression. He was also rather slow in this aspect, so he naturally did not know why she would go to the Little Orange Garden to find Mo Yu. He could only think about how the object of today's date was to eat a meal, so he asked uncertainly, "We might as well eat something else in this alley, or...go to some other place?"



"Let's just eat here."

Xu Yourong offered him the umbrella.

Chen Changsheng very naturally received the umbrella.

No words were required, not even a glance. Offering and receiving the umbrella were both very natural actions, as if performed countless times.

This was because, in the Garden of Zhou, they really had done these actions countless times—in the Plains of the Unsetting Sun, when they were encountering monsters and needed to hurry away, in the majority of cases, she was on his back with the umbrella in her hands. Whenever she was tired, she would hand the umbrella over to him.

With Chen Changsheng holding the umbrella, they walked side by side into the small alley.

The speed at which time changed the things of the world was perhaps not as fast as flowing water, but to change the restaurants in one alley was exceptionally easy.

The most famous dish of Fortune Peace Road had long since ceased to be Fish with Tofu, and was now Pot-Simmered Ribs.

In this short alley, there were five restaurants serving pot-simmered ribs, and every one of their signs claimed that their ribs

were authentic Qi City Ribs, but it was impossible to know which one was true.

The steam rising from the iron pots seeped out of those restaurants, mixed with the heavy aroma of meat. In the cold weather, it was incomparably enticing.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong did not fear the cold, but they still found themselves somewhat yearning for this taste. Finding a restaurant that was relatively clean, they walked in.

The pots used for pot-simmered ribs were all set on kang. After opening up the thick curtain hanging over the door, they were confronted by a wave of heat.

Today, the business was rather poor. This store that would normally be bustling with business today had only one kang table with customers. To be customers in this sort of circumstance naturally meant that these were true gourmets. Their attention was completely focused on the fragrant ribs and wine, not even noticing the young couple that had just walked in.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong walked to the innermost part of the restaurant. Before they could even sit down, they suddenly heard the sound of intense argument erupting from behind them.

One gourmet slammed his cup of wine down on the table and angrily roared, "Lady Yourong beat Chen Changsheng like he was a dog! How could she have lost?"

The other gourmet sneered, "Then why did Lady Yourong concede?"

The first gourmet was holding back so much his face was completely red. He choked out, "...That's because she couldn't forget the old times. Thinking of how Chen Changsheng was once her fiancé, she went easy on him."

Hearing their argument, the owner walked out of the kitchen and quickly went to smooth things over. After appeasing his customers with great difficulty, he saw the figures of his new customers in the corner. That young couple had not sat down yet and the atmosphere was rather awkward. He found it strange, thinking, what do the arguments of others have to do with you two?

## Chapter 526 - Sitting Across From Each Other, Gnawing On Ribs

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The kangas of this restaurant were very clean, and no dust could be seen on the edges of the kangas which easily accumulated dust. However, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong did not sit down. Hearing the argument coming from behind, it was difficult for them to not feel embarrassed. Only after the owner came over was this awkward atmosphere alleviated.

Perhaps it was because of the Yellow Paper Umbrella, or perhaps it was because the corner they were in was somewhat dim, but the owner did not recognize them. His face filled with smiles, he asked, "What do my two guests wish to eat? This store's main dish is all sorts of ribs; is there a particular one that you enjoy eating?"

Chen Changsheng looked to Xu Yourong sitting across from, wanting to hear if she had any ideas. Xu Yourong lowered her head and said nothing.

"What about...my two guests first order a bowl of pork bone soup to warm the body and then slowly consider what else to order?"

The owner increasingly felt that something was strange with this young couple, but after running a restaurant in the capital for so many years, he had encountered his fair share of strange situations and would naturally not trouble himself too much over it.

Hearing a certain word in the owner's words, Chen Changsheng once again felt his face heat up. Waving his hand, he said, "Let's

not. What about some beef ribs?"

The latter part of this was naturally inquiring after Xu Yourong's opinion. Xu Yourong didn't have much of an opinion. She was just recalling her conversations with him in the Garden of Zhou, but she couldn't remember him having any sort of taboo against pork. Why did he have such a big reaction then? She couldn't help but be curious.

The owner was a very straightforward and efficient man. After adding on a few appetizers for them, he retreated to the kitchen to prepare the food, leaving just the two of them at the kang in the corner. Xu Yourong blinked her eyes and cut off the sounds of argument coming from the front. Looking at him, she asked the question on her mind.

"It's not any taboo...it's just..."

Chen Changsheng hesitated for a while, then said very earnestly, "Tang Thirty-Six said I was a pig. I felt that I really was a pig, so I don't want to eat pork at this moment."

Xu Yourong understood what he meant and couldn't hold back a smile. Suddenly, she recalled something and creased her brow as she asked, "You told Tang Tang?"

"No, he was cursing me for some other reason when he called me a pig," Chen Changsheng explained.

After this brief dialogue, the area around the kang once more fell silent. The customers sitting at the table were still engaged in a fierce argument, but none of their voices came in. Not even the sound of the snowstorm outside the restaurant could be heard around the kang. Only the crackling of the firewood in the kang could be heard, but in reality, this was not a sound a normal person could hear.

"That person spoke incorrectly."

Xu Yourong glanced at the other kang, then turned back to him and very seriously explained, "I didn't go easy on you at the Bridge of Helplessness. I was very serious."

She absolutely had to make this point clear because this was a fact, because this reflected the respect she had for Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng replied, "Although I calculated and planned for a tie, my cultivation, talent and comprehension are all inferior to yours. If I didn't use my full strength, I wouldn't be able to make it a tie."

"What I wanted was to fight you in a fair and upright manner."

Xu Yourong calmly continued, "Whether in the Garden of Zhou or in the future, I would probably not have another such chance, so after entering the capital...I didn't come to find you."

Only at this point did Chen Changsheng completely understand why she had kept this concealed from him.

One of them was the next Pope, the other was the newly appointed Holy Maiden, and they respectively represented the two great powers of the Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court. No matter how one looked at it, they were natural enemies, but if he were to know of her real identity, it would naturally be impossible for him to fight such a fierce battle today on the Bridge of Helplessness. This would always be the case, now, and far into the future.

He could not regard her as an enemy, and he believed that she would feel the same.

"But you still didn't use your most powerful technique."

Chen Changsheng looked at her and continued, "If I remember correctly, in the Garden of Zhou, your blood awakened once more."

Xu Yourong affirmed, "Yes."

Chen Changsheng said, "If you really did use the blood of the Heavenly Phoenix, I would not be a match for you."

Xu Yourong answered, "You really thought that I would defeat you like that?"

Chen Changsheng hesitated, then replied, "In truth...I just

wanted to see you unfurl your Phoenix wings. I imagine it should be very beautiful."

There were many things that didn't need to be taught, that didn't need pointers from Tang Thirty-Six. Even the most inarticulate person would occasionally be able to speak very beautiful words.

When in front of the target that he wished to express his goodwill and love towards.

Xu Yourong thought to herself, you saw it before, it was just that you were sleeping then.

Because of these rarely encountered beautiful words from Chen Changsheng, she felt rather out of sorts, rather shy. Changing the subject, she noted, "You also only used one sword."

She knew more than anyone else in the world that all the swords of the Sword Pool lay within Chen Changsheng's sheath. That was truly his most powerful technique.

"Even if the ten thousand swords attacked at once, it's not a given that it could contend with your Sword of Great Light."

Chen Changsheng looked into her eyes and sighed in admiration, "You truly are extraordinary."

Xu Yourong looked back into his eyes and helplessly sighed, "Did you really not sense it?"



"Sense what?"

"The blade intent concealed within the Sword of Great Light."

Hearing this, Chen Changsheng was incredibly shocked, thinking, the Sword of Great Light is the world's most ingenious sword technique. What sort of blade intent could possibly harness it?

"I used the Halving Blade Style to change blade intent into sword intent. Only through this was I able to barely use the Sword of Great Light."

Xu Yourong continued, "I also have to thank you for clashing sword intents with me, or else it would simply be impossible for me to, in just these past few days, grasp this sword technique."

Upon hearing "Halving Blade Style", Chen Changsheng was further shocked, thinking, isn't the Halving Blade Style still temporarily unusable? Upon hearing the latter half of her words, he understood that although he had never used the Halving Blade Style, it was so tyrannical and wild that it was still able to forcefully conceal itself amongst his sword intent. On the Bridge of Helplessness, Xu Yourong was able to take the blade techniques she had grasped, meld them with the blade intent he was emitting, ultimately comprehend a little blade intent, and thus display the Sword of Great Light.

In the view of many, today's battle on the Bridge of Helplessness

was representative of many things, but no one imagined that to Xu Yourong, besides being a battle in which she could fight to her heart's content, the battle on the Bridge of Helplessness had also assisted her in comprehending the profound accomplishments of the Halving Blade Style, thus giving her an excellent chance of grasping the Sword of Great Light.

When Chen Changsheng thought of this, he couldn't help but be filled with admiration for her, but also feel it a little improper. He thought, why such a rush, even acting in such a dangerous fashion? If in the battle on the Bridge of Helplessness, she had failed to grasp the essentials of the Halving Blade and was incapable of grasping the Sword of Great Light, and then adding on the possibility of him having a slip of the hand, the results might have been too terrifying to imagine.

Words were not needed. Xu Yourong only needed to see the concern in his eyes to understand what he was thinking. She calmly explained, "I am the world's youngest Holy Maiden and also the weakest. Teacher has left and the Empress is still a person of Zhou, so I have to establish my power as quickly as possible."

This was a very plain statement, even somewhat crude, but it was very sincere.

The vast majority of the Holy Maidens of the south had all stepped into the Divine Domain, and her teacher was a Saint that could easily dispatch the Storms of the Eight Directions. Even the weakest of the Holy Maidens were experts half a step into the Divine. She was the only one to become Holy Maiden at the age of sixteen, not even breaking into Star Condensation yet.

As the youngest and weakest Holy Maiden in history, Holy Maiden Peak and South Stream would remain silent. And what sort of pressure would she have to endure, what sort of trials would she have to confront?

As Chen Changsheng gazed at her somewhat thin and weak shoulders, he suddenly recalled those conversations they had in the Garden of Zhou. Back then, she had said that she carried a very heavy responsibility and found it very arduous, wishing to avoid it. He had believed that she was a genius maiden of the Elf clan and carried the heavy responsibility of the rejuvenation of the elves, so he had attempted to ease her anxieties. But now he knew that she was the reincarnation of the Heavenly Phoenix, the hope of Holy Maiden Peak and the Divine Empress, carrying the responsibility of assisting the entire human world in resisting the demons. Now how could he ease her anxieties?

"In the future, you can let me handle some things."

"I can do it."

"I'm the Principal of the Orthodox Academy."

"In the future, I will become the Pope of the Orthodoxy."

In his mind, he thought these words and tried changing up the sequence. He couldn't shake off the feeling that this was in Tang Thirty-Six's way of speaking, and just as he was hesitating...

"Traditional beef ribs, guests, please enjoy."

Carrying a steaming pot of beef ribs, the owner interrupted this important conversation concerning the future of the human world.

Different from other restaurants, this restaurant's pot-simmered ribs were stewed in the kitchen first before being served. Although this caused some rustic flavor to be lost, it was certainly much cleaner. No wonder all the kang were clean without even a speck of dust.

Soon after, an assortment of appetizers was served and the two began to eat.

Maybe it was because the appetizers were too tasty or the ribs were too fragrant and very troublesome to eat, but Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong did not speak for a very long time.

In the quiet corner, one could only hear the crackle of firewood within the kang and the occasional sound of a chopstick knocking against a bowl.

After some time had passed, Chen Changsheng raised his head and looked over. It was only at this point that he realized that today, she did not wear that white set of ceremonial clothes, nor did she wear a white dress. Instead, she wore a rather thick cotton jacket. He then remembered back in Xunyang City, he found the white ceremonial clothes of the Holy Maiden to be rather familiar.

Then, he also remembered that in that temple by the White Grass Path, she had once said that when she was growing up, there were quite a few rules during mealtimes and she was not allowed to speak. Was the current peace an environment that she was used to?

Then I should eat according to what she's used to. At least I won't make her feel uncomfortable.

Chen Changsheng thought this way, but he did not take up his chopsticks, instead continuing to stare at her.

Because she truly was very pretty.

The steam rising up from the pot was very similar to the misty rain and foggy snow on the Bridge of Helplessness. In the steam, her face was incredibly beautiful, like a painting.

However, the current her was not at all like the Phoenix fairy of rumors.

Her petite figure almost seemed engulfed by her cotton jacket. The splendor she displayed towards all had completely vanished, leaving behind a normal little girl.

Her head was lowered as she gently blew on the steam and carefully nibbled on the ribs. It was a very cute appearance, just like a baby beast.

The most straightforward pot-simmered ribs were actually consumed by her in such a delicate manner, as if she was lightly sampling the exquisite pastries of the south. However, though she ate with such grace, her speed was not slow. It didn't take long for the table in front of her to be piled high with extremely clean bones.

Her face was a little red. Perhaps it was because of the heat, or perhaps she was shy, or perhaps it was because she could feel that gaze of his which he refused to move.

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## Chapter 527 - Chatting

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Ultimately, evidence fell in favor of the latter.

Xu Yourong raised her head and asked Chen Changsheng, "Why aren't you eating?"

"Oh, yeah, eating." In the past two years, under the influence of Tang Thirty-Six, Chen Changsheng was much more talkative, but in front of her, it was almost like he had returned to being the young and obedient Daoist boy from Xining Village. His words were extremely simple, his thoughts exceptionally pure, and it was impossible for him to conceal any sort of emotion.

For example, at this moment, he was rather distracted, so when he took up his chopsticks, his grip was not very firm. He extended his hand like the wind to support the chopsticks in midair, but he also pushed the unfurled Yellow Paper Umbrella to the side. As a result, the argument that still persisted in the kang in front of them became audible once more.

"Last spring, Little Principal Chen entered the capital and received such humiliation in the Divine General's estate. Afterwards, he was suppressed multiple times in succession. His talent was clearly extraordinary and his entrance exam scores were all excellent, but he was forcefully removed from the accepted applicant list of every school. If His Holiness had not been protecting him in secret, he might not even have been able to enter the already-deteriorated Orthodox Academy. People like you say that his annulling the marriage was a heartless act, but none of you ever thought, if the Xu family had not acted so shamelessly, how

could this destined marriage come to this?"

"And what does this have to do with Lady Yourong? During the Ivy Festival, the White Crane returned north. In the letter it carried, she admitted that this engagement existed, or else with only the marriage contract in Chen Changsheng's hand, how could the diplomatic mission from the south be left powerless to object? Even if Chen Changsheng holds a grudge against the Divine General's estate, there's no reason to inflict such humiliation on Lady Yourong!"

"Hmph, at the time, Xu Shiji obstinately refused to recognize this marriage and the people of the Divine General of the East's Estate acted so snobbishly, but it turns out that now that things are different with Little Principal Chen, they've turned around and want to hug his leg now? They truly have no sense of shame! All of you say that Little Principal Chen ending the engagement is a humiliation? In my view, this is the Divine General of the East's estate humiliating itself!"

"But still, none of this has anything to do with the Holy Maiden. For what reason should she bear such slanderous gossip?"

"One can only say that the Holy Maiden had the misfortune of being born in this sort of house, of having such parents!"

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The kang in the corner was very quiet, the only sound being the gurgling of the meat broth in the pot.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong sat across from each other by the kang, the atmosphere once more rather heavy.

It had already been almost two years since he had come to the capital. The matter of the engagement had already spread to the entire continent. The humiliation and suppression the Divine General of the East's estate had once inflicted upon him, the later change in their attitude, the sudden transformation of the young Daoist boy from the countryside into the successor to the Orthodoxy—all these things had been enthusiastically chatted about by everybody.

Today's battle on the Bridge of Helplessness seemed almost like the final conclusion to this story, the final decision, yet it couldn't really put an end to everything. On the contrary, it pushed people's interest in this story to its peak. It could be believed that just like the gourmets sitting by that table, in the countless mansions and homes, everyone was discussing this matter.

The Divine General's estate had once humiliated him, and he had never forgotten it. He had also once had many feelings for her who had been in the distant south. However, just as that other customer had said, in this matter, she truthfully had not done anything to harm him, yet now she had to bear the ridicule and censure aimed at the Divine General's estate.

This was perhaps rather unfair.

Chen Changsheng didn't know what to say.

"In the end, they're still my parents."

Xu Yourong's expression was very calm as if unaffected by that discussion. However, the following change in topic occurred far too abruptly.

"I want to drink some wine."

"Okay."

Chen Changsheng had the owner bring over two small jars of his finest wine. Unsealing one of the jars, he filled her cup to seventy percent full.

Xu Yourong softly said her thanks, then unsealed the other jar and poured wine into his cup until it was full. Finally, she looked to him and said, "Ask away."

Chen Changsheng still didn't know what to say. As he thought it over, he saw her beautiful face and asked with some hesitation, "Face?"

"A certain technique from South Stream Temple."

"Oh."

After this simple question and answer, the kang once more grew silent.

Xu Yourong brought the wine cup up to her mouth and took a very light sip. It was just a sip, but her face blushed a little.

"Don't tell other people that we met in the Garden of Zhou."

"Why?"

When Chen Changsheng heard her request on the Bridge of Helplessness, he could not understand it. Now when he heard confirmation that she really did not wish for others to know of this matter, he was even more puzzled.

Xu Yourong did not directly answer her question, instead softly asking, "Hasn't the engagement already been annulled?"

This was a piece of information that had circulated in the capital for quite some time, but it had never been admitted by either the Orthodox Academy or the Divine General of the East's estate. But as one of the parties of the engagement, she naturally knew that the rumors were not rumors, but rather a thing that had really happened.

For a long time, Chen Changsheng said nothing.

On the bridge when the wind brushed away her white gauze and he saw her eyes, that was the happiest moment in his sixteen years of life. Compared to when he was finally able to memorize the last scroll of the Daoist Canon in the old temple, when he found his Fated Star in the Orthodox Academy, when he obtained first rank of the first banner in the Grand Examination, when he found Wang Zhice's notebook in the Lingyan Pavilion...it was happier than all those moments.

She had been alive all along, she was her, she was his fiancée. Was there any encounter in the world as bizarre as this, any matter as good?

When he was taking a bath in the house back at the Orthodox Academy, he had already planned it all out. He was going to go the Li Palace and ask the Pope to reconstruct the marriage contract. Then, he would take Tang Thirty-Six and the rest to the Imperial Palace to find her. If she agreed, he would propose to her straight away.

He had never gone through a love affair before, but as long as he decided this was something he wanted to do, he would absolutely carry out it with extreme diligence and focus, seizing every minute.

But now she said that he could not tell of this matter to anyone else, so how could he convince the Pope to rescind the decree that annulled the marriage contract?

A month ago, he had worked arduously to finally annul the engagement.

Now, he realized that he really wanted this engagement.

Tang Thirty-Six had spoken very correctly.

"I thought you were dead, and in the Garden of Zhou, I promised you that I would annul the engagement, so..."

He looked at Xu Yourong and said rather helplessly, "Since you knew who I was, why didn't you tell me sooner?"

Xu Yourong's expression seemed to chill somewhat. "In the Garden of Zhou, you deceived me. I had to realize the truth myself, so why would I have to tell you?"

Chen Changsheng believed himself innocent, asking, "When did I deceive you?"

"Could it be that you're called Xu Sheng?"

"You're not Lady Chujian."

"Why did you not want to admit that you were Chen Changsheng?"

"Back then, why didn't you say that you were Xu Yourong?"

They looked into each other's eyes, speaking the questions at almost the same time.

Then they both remembered, back in the snowy temple by the White Grass Path, when they introduced themselves for the first time, they had also spoken at the same time, giving out two false names...

They didn't remember just what they had been thinking back then.

Chen Changsheng recalled his mood from that time. The primary reason he had not wanted her to know of his identity was because he didn't want her to know that he had a world-famous fiancée. Perhaps Xu Yourong was thinking the same, not wishing for him to know that she had such a well-known fiancé?

"Is having a fiancé like me such a shameful thing?"

He asked Xu Yourong, rather serious, and also rather bitter and sad.

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# Chapter 528 - I Hear That Your Home Doesn't Have A Plain

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Of course, it could not be for this reason.

As Chen Changsheng recalled the scene in that snowy temple, he quickly rejected his theory. Soon after, he thought of another important question.

At the time, Xu Yourong had said that she was called Chen Chujian.

She was surnamed Chen—perhaps he was somewhat imagining that his love was reciprocated, but he always felt that this had something to do with him, just like how he had said that he was called Xu Sheng.

He didn't ask any more questions because he realized that this matter truly was quite disorderly. If he continued to probe further into the situation in the Garden of Zhou, he might develop an unpleasant impression towards Xu Yourong's fiancé, and wouldn't that just be getting jealous of himself?

This matter truly was rather disorderly, the reasons unclear.

One had studied the Daoist Canons since he was young, the myriad principles at his fingertips. One had a serene Dao heart, at the age of twelve beginning to research the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong's innate intelligence

were both one in a million. Both were cultivating geniuses, but in the Garden of Zhou, they had handled matters in a very hurried fashion and committed hundreds of mistakes.

Xu Yourong did not respond to Chen Changsheng's silly question. The beef ribs were still gurgling in the pot. In this peaceful moment, looking into each other's eyes, the two understood why they had both chosen to conceal their identities. They did not miss a single one of the subtle changes in emotion that had occurred back then.

In the end, they were both smart children, just like those pure white snowflakes drifting down outside the restaurant.

However, there were still some things that needed to be resolved, or else the mind would always feel somewhat uncomfortable. For example, that matter.

"You and Princess Luoluo, and also the little Black Dragon?"

Xu Yourong had not stated it clearly, but Chen Changsheng understood what she asked.

Back in the Mausoleum of Zhou, she had once said that her fiancé was a womanizer, and one...that only consorted with uncomprehending young girls.

Chen Changsheng suddenly remembered, at the time, he had cursed this fiancé—"Truly a shameless piece of scum!"



As it turned out, he had been cursing himself.

Thinking of this, he felt rather complex, not knowing how to even start explaining. He could only sigh.

"Presumably, Miss Shuang'er told you?"

Only knowing the truth after half a year had delivered too heavy a blow against his psyche, so much so that he didn't even notice that besides Luoluo, Xu Yourong had also mentioned the little Black Dragon.

He rather helplessly defended himself, "Think about it, we should be the two people who most understand the principle that what the eyes see is not necessarily the truth."

"Perhaps."

Xu Yourong softly replied, then raised her head and gazed at him, a spark of light flashing across her eyes.

She seemed to have thought of something, causing her to arch her brows. As a result, the ethereal mountain waters within her beautiful, painting-like appearance suddenly came to life, and that light gained an edge.

"I remember, back then you said that fiancée..."

Chen Changsheng's expression flickered. Back then in the Mausoleum of Zhou, he had once described his fiancée to her. Although he had not intentionally ridiculed or dishonored her, he really hadn't said anything nice about her either, but...

"Didn't you say yourself that it was better to not have this sort of woman?" He couldn't help but argue.

Xu Yourong replied, "This is because I was misled by your words."

At the time, she had an extremely low evaluation of this fiancée of Xu Sheng's, even finding her rather shameless—proud, stupid, terrible vision, and she even had a problem of virtue.

From the moment she realized that these were all evaluations of herself, she found it hard to not be rather angry and ashamed.

At the time, her evaluation had been very critical. Later on, it was filled with anger and shame.

One need not examine her current calm expression. The small hand within the sleeve of her cotton jacket was tightly clenched into a fist.

This matter was still very disorderly.

Chen Changsheng gazed at the wine in his cup and sighed once more.

When he was ten, after that strange scent had shrouded the old temple, he had fallen silent for many days and then moaned and groaned for many days after that. From that point on, he had never sighed as much as he did today.

Everything had been a misunderstanding.

At times, the things and encounters of the world were truly very coincidental, very unfathomable.

There had already been all sorts of grudges and emotions between the two of them, but as it turned out, in the Garden of Zhou, they met under different identities and then experienced many days together.

Fortunately, they were finally able to meet once more. It could be presumed that there would be many more occasions to have these difficult-to-explain, difficult-to-understand matters cleared up.

It was fine as long as this misunderstanding did not persist for the rest of their lives.

Thinking about this, Chen Changsheng was no longer so weighed down by anxiety. Looking at her, he grinned.

"What are you grinning about?" Xu Yourong asked.

Chen Changsheng responded, "Happy."

Xu Yourong's eyes drooped and her eyelashes fluttered.

Suddenly, she covered her mouth with her hand and burped.

"Drank too much," she explained embarrassedly.

The alcohol content of this wine was rather high. Given that she was not using her true essence to dispel the wine, after drinking so many cups, she truly should have been drunk by now.

Or else why would her cheeks be blushing again?

Chen Changsheng asked concernedly, "Is your injury okay? Is drinking wine okay?"

As he spoke, his gaze fell upon her sleeve. Seeing the finger that had just poked out of the sleeve, he realized that there was no wound.

Then he realized, she had once studied at the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green and now she was even the Holy Maiden of South Stream Temple. With the Sacred Light, there was absolutely no need to worry himself over these things.

Xu Yourong glanced at him and asked, "Do you really think I

couldn't beat you?"

Chen Changsheng thought, how did we get back to this topic? Changing the subject, he declared, "I have something important to tell you."

With a flick of Xu Yourong's finger, a gale kicked up and slowly rolled the Yellow Paper Umbrella on the floor into its original position. There were now two more tables of guests in the restaurant and it was even noisier. Now, the sound from the outside could no longer enter, and the occasional gaze sent over to their corner was blocked off by that invisible wall.

With the Yellow Paper Umbrella and both of their current cultivation levels, unless a peak level Star Condensation cultivator personally came to eavesdrop, nobody would be able to notice them.

"Do you still remember all those treasures and valuables we found in those stone chambers in the Mausoleum of Zhou?"

Chen Changsheng took the Stainless Sword from his waist and placed it by the pot, then began to take things out of its sheath.

This was the first time Xu Yourong had such a close view of this valuable treasure of the Orthodoxy—not the Stainless Sword, but rather the sheath known as the Vault Sheath. She examined it very seriously and with great interest. She was so interested that she didn't really care much for Chen Changsheng's solemn words, giving a casual 'uh-huh' in reply.

"Right before Nanke used the Soul Wood to command the monster tide to surround the mausoleum, the Soul Pivot started going crazy and broke many things. Those herbs and medicines had originally lost their effectiveness, so their destruction didn't matter too much. It's just a pity about those secret manuals. Oh, as for the jade and crystals, after being pulverized into a powder, they're worthless now. The gold is still okay. Later on, I requested someone to melt it all down and cast it back into ingots, so not much was lost. These are pearls...I hear that powdered pearls can be made into tea and drinking it is supposed to be good for one's looks. We don't need to divide this. In a while, you can just take all of it with you."

Chen Changsheng incessantly took out items and incessantly spoke.

This finally caught Xu Yourong's attention. Looking over at those boxes by the stove, she asked, "What are you talking about?"

"We already agreed on this, that we would divide the treasures of the Mausoleum of Zhou equally."

Chen Changsheng looked at her very seriously and continued, "If those medicines were still usable, then when Senior Su Li was heavily injured, I would have used some. But for the rest of the things, since we hadn't agreed on it, I kept them all. Just, to make it more convenient, I asked the Bureau of Ecclesiastic Education to help me exchange some of the items for silver taels and other items."

He spoke the truth. He had always believed that the treasures of the Mausoleum of Zhou were not his alone. Until he confirmed whether she was alive or dead, he had no right to use them. Thus, when Tang Thirty-Six asked him for money, he did not mention that he had these treasures. Moreover, when he believed that she had already left this world, he had made an even more incomprehensible decision.

"This is a deed...I asked Jin Yulu to go to the lower reaches of the Red River and acquire a large plain to leave for you," he said, pointing to a box.

Xu Yourong was a little startled, asking, "Why would you give this to me?"

Chen Changsheng explained, "At the time, I thought you were no longer alive, so I felt I had to leave something behind for your tribe in your place, and that plain is closest to your homeland..."

At the time, he was still of the belief that she was a young genius girl of the Elf race, bearing the heavy responsibility of reviving the Elf race.

Xu Yourong understood, but remained silent.

Chen Changsheng misunderstood her silence and said awkwardly, "Of course, now I know that you don't have any use for this plain. This matter truly does seem rather silly now."

"No, it's very good, I like it a lot."

She took the box and said to him as she gazed at his face through the steam rising from the pot.

Back in the Mausoleum of Zhou, he had cared not a whit for those treasures and secrets, and was only in a rush to find a medicine for her. Back then, this had moved her greatly.

It was the same case now.

"I'll leave everything else with you. I didn't bring out the Tong Palace, so it's inconvenient for me to bring it all with me."

In a very natural tone, she continued, "Whenever I need it, I'll go and find you."

This was a very good arrangement and Chen Changsheng was filled with praise towards this proposal. But he thought about how she was now master of South Stream Temple and probably had to spend money in all sorts of places, so said, "These assorted items you can leave with me, but take the pearl powder and box of silver taels with you."

Xu Yourong replied, "These are all external things, there's no need to care about them too much."

Chen Changsheng didn't understand this sort of otherworldly attitude towards life, so asked, "Then what should we care about?"



She wasn't really otherworldly, it was just that compared to the fires of humanity, the myriad stars above were all the more dazzling and bright.

"We should care about...the fact that we are opponents, enemies."

Xu Yourong stared into his eyes, her voice very calm, the expression in her eyes somewhat complex, and the starlight in the very depths of her eyes slightly shaking.

Beautiful, yet stirring up a sense of unease.

Yes, whether or not there was still an engagement between the two of them, the two were destined to be rivals. In the future, they might even be mortal enemies.

The schism of the Orthodoxy's north and south, the struggle between the new and conservative, the difference in opinions on this world between the Divine Empress and the Pope.

The three primary conflicts of the human world now rested on their bodies.

[Above and below the balcony, poison and dagger](#), the lonely tomb on the yellow sands and the butterflies in the cold? No matter how one looked at it, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong's story seemed that it would ultimately develop in such a fashion. Perhaps sad, perhaps tragic, perhaps it would be a romance that would be

passed down through all of history. In brief, this matter easily stirred sorrow in others.

(The first line refers to two rather famous tragedies, the first being Romeo and Juliet, the second being The Butterfly Lovers.)

He and she were so young, their shoulders so weak and thin—how could they carry along so many burdens?

But he and she seemed completely unaware of this all. They had just fought on the Bridge of Helplessness, then soon after sat together to eat ribs and drink wine. Chen Changsheng especially seemed completely clueless to the general situation, utterly oblivious to all the dangerous obstacles between the two of them, because he really had...

"I forgot," he said rather sheepishly to her.

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# Chapter 529 - Entering The Palace In The Snowy Night

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This was an answer that could easily render others speechless.

Precisely as Tang Thirty-Six had said, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong really were two people that made others speechless.

Perhaps it was for precisely this reason that when Xu Yourong heard Chen Changsheng's answer, she showed no surprise, much less anger. On the contrary, she was very satisfied.

He only remembered that after dusk, he should come to Fortune Peace Road to eat Tofu and Fish, even though they ultimately ended up eating beef ribs. He only remembered the conversation they had in the Mausoleum of Zhou, so he split up the gold and treasures into two piles and used the majority of his part to buy a plain by the lower reaches of the Red River, even though she had nothing to do with the elves. He only remembered promising her that he would end the engagement, so he, regardless of the criticisms of the common people, requested the Pope to forcefully annul the engagement, even though this matter now looked very silly and he was now even trying to get back the marriage contract...

To make a mistake on a few things was not important. To forget a few things was even less important. As long as one remembered a few things, it was just fine.

Chen Changsheng's answer and the fragrant beef ribs in the pot

allowed Xu Yourong to not have the slightest regret about passing him that slip of paper on the Bridge of Helplessness.

She softly spoke, "I ate very well, thank you."

Saying this, she stood up, put away that deed to the plain, took the Yellow Paper Umbrella up from the floor, and began to walk out of the restaurant.

The noisy clamor instantly surged back in and Chen Changsheng was a little taken aback. As he watched her raise the curtain and walk out, he suddenly remembered something, that he still had one very important thing to give to her. He quickly went after her, but in the face of the cold and the snowflakes drifting down the dark street, how could he possibly catch sight of her figure?

He gazed at the string of ten stone pearls on his wrist and thought, such an important object, I absolutely cannot forget next time.

From the side came the restaurant owner's voice, "Dear guest, there's still some beef ribs left. Is Sir prepared to take it away or eat a little longer?"

Chen Changsheng turned and saw the owner's face was rather uneasy. After vacantly staring at him for a moment, he realized that the owner was worried that he was going to skip on the bill.

The owner rubbed his hand, looking at him rather nervously.

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Carrying the wrapped leftovers of the beef ribs, Chen Changsheng returned to the Orthodox Academy.

In the darkness, the winter forest by the lake seemed somewhat sinister. Thankfully, the snow weighing down the tree branches somewhat mollified this feeling. Deep within the forest, thundering booms could be faintly heard, occasionally accompanied by the appearance of extremely thin rays of light, like lightning bolts. This was Xuanyuan Po practicing.

Su Moyu was in the library, instructing the new students. Zhexiu, who was gradually recovering, had buried himself under some pile of snow to hone his spirit and will. Only Tang Thirty-Six had not gone out, nor was he in his own room. Instead, he was in Chen Changsheng's, waiting for him.

It wasn't merely because he was curious about where Chen Changsheng had gone off to, nor was it because investigating this guy's secrets had truly made him almost as wrathful as a god. Rather, it was because the item in his hand was such an object that he absolutely had to deliver it into Chen Changsheng's hands personally before he could be at ease.

Even the wealthiest man in the world would find himself powerless to compensate for the loss of this item.

Because this was the Divine Staff that represented the power of the Orthodoxy. Even with money, one would not be able to buy it.

Tang Thirty-Six had already sat in this room for a very long time. When he thought of that embarrassing scene in the Li Palace, thought of those gazes that were like swords such that even now his back still felt a little sore, and then he thought about how Chen Changsheng was having the time of his life at some random place, his mood continued to get worse.

So when Chen Changsheng returned to his room, it was only right that he saw a very nasty face.

For some reason, perhaps because he had been concealing the truth, when he saw Tang Thirty-Six's complexion, Chen Changsheng felt uneasy. He placed the food box on the table and pretended not to see that Tang Thirty-Six was sitting on his bed, pretended that he wasn't a clean freak. He carefully said, "Fortune Peace Road's beef ribs taste rather good."

"The taste of His Holiness's Divine Staff is even better."

The unsightly expression on Tang Thirty-Six's face had vanished to some place, but the deliberate indifference that represented his rage was very easy to see.

Chen Changsheng took the Divine Staff in a state of shock. Although Tang Thirty-Six had anticipated this and mentioned the matter to him, Chen Changsheng had still been caught by surprise.

Tang Thirty-Six said in a chilly voice, "You're not going give an explanation?"

Chen Changsheng glanced at him and replied, "I just arranged to eat a meal with someone, not anything big."

"But it's still something you can't tell me?"

"Mm."

"Then who did you eat with?"

"I also can't say..."

Chen Changsheng was rather tense, but when he thought back to the scene of Xu Yourong sitting across from, drinking wine, he couldn't help but turn his lips up in a smile.

Seeing this, Tang Thirty-Six sucked in a cold breath and asked, "A woman?"

Chen Changsheng asked in disbelief, "How did you tell?"

Tang Thirty-Six sneered, "Seeing your beaming face with all your emotions as open as a book, only Xuanyuan Po wouldn't be able to tell."

Chen Changsheng was a little distressed and was clueless as to how to respond.

"Three days, at most three days." Tang Thirty-Six grit his teeth and declared, "I will definitely find out the truth of this matter. You just met Xu Yourong, but instead of being charmed, you went off with some other girl. I'm really curious as to just what this girl looks like."

Chen Changsheng was rather confused and also faintly dissatisfied. He asked, "Why can't I go and meet with Xu Yourong?"

Tang Thirty-Six expressionlessly said to him, "Xu Yourong will meet with you in private? You might as well say that you're Su Li's illegitimate son."

Chen Changsheng thought it over, then said, "If that were the case, wouldn't Zhexiu have to call me 'brother-in-law'?"

Tang Thirty-Six roared in laughter, but then he thought of something and his smile vanished.

He looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "You've actually figured out how to tell a joke, and it was actually really funny...you're definitely finished."

Puzzled, Chen Changsheng asked, "What?"



Tang Thirty-Six said to him with a sympathetic gaze, "It looks to me that you really love this girl, or why else would your personality have changed so much? In the future, what's going to happen to you?"

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Chen Changsheng lay on his bed, tossing and turning until it was late in the night, still unable to sleep.

After the age of ten, besides that period in the capital where he attracted starlight but failed to succeed in Purification, this was the first time that he suffered from insomnia.

Tang Thirty-Six's final words had seemingly ripped open the curtains of the window and caused the starlight to fall upon the snowy plain in his body, revealing with startling clarity every one of his emotions.

In this half-year after his departure from the Garden of Zhou, he would often think of her, whether he was sitting on the great banyan tree by the lake or amongst the massive stones of the Mausoleum of Zhou. However, what he did not understand was... that sort of longing had been a longing for what was missing, until today on the Bridge of Helplessness when he saw the white gauze fall and saw her eyes. Especially before in the restaurant, the image of her wrapped in a big cotton jacket, her small mouth sipping on wine and gnawing on ribs, was different from the Garden of Zhou,

different from the stories. Yet it was incomparably true, truly good to see that appearance that made him want to get even closer to her.

Thus, this longing had fallen into reality and gained a real weight.

A longing that was true and had weight was called a yearning, and once one began yearning, it was difficult to sleep.

Chen Changsheng was a person slow to speak, but quick to act. In any case, since he wanted to see her and he couldn't sleep, he would just go see her.

Xu Yourong had told him to not let anyone know that they knew each other, so he could not take the normal way to see her, but instead had to sneak in to see her.

He got out of bed, put on his clothes, and flew through the window. He passed through the winter forest and used the key to open the secret door in the palace walls that had been concealed exceedingly well by ivy, and walked on in.

He opened the heavy door a crack. Looking into the palace grounds that were shrouded in darkness, he was rather nervous, so much so that even the whistles from his mouth were rather hoarse.

He was a youth that lived a very orderly life and rarely did this

sort of thing. Although he had sneaked into the Imperial Palace several times, the circumstances now were rather different from those of the past. The Pope had just formally announced tonight that he was the successor to the Orthodoxy, and now he was infiltrating the Imperial Palace in the middle of the night. If he were discovered by anybody, it would definitely be a major event.

As the snowflakes slowly drifted down, the red walls and yellow eaves of the Imperial Palace were all draped in white.

The Divine Empress looked out the window at the snow, her lips turning into a mocking smile. She asked, "Do you know when people are the most courageous?"

The confluence of north and south was imminent and the matters that required handling for each side had suddenly increased. Mo Yu had accompanied the Empress late into the night taking care of these matters and was rather exhausted. Upon hearing this sudden question, she gazed off vacantly for a moment before responding in a soft voice, "When confronting death?"

"It's not wrong, but there is another situation...because of love."

The Divine Empress looked out the window at the dark palace and continued, "In other words, when driven by passion."

The sky danced with snow and the light of lanterns was profuse. It seemed like daytime, not late night, in the Imperial Palace, causing black objects to appear all the more conspicuous.

When Chen Changsheng saw the Black Goat slowly amble out of the plaza covered in snow, he was filled with gratitude.

He told the Black Goat his reason for coming.

The Black Goat glanced at him twice and then turned and walked off. After quite some time, it pointed its horns at a certain palace hall and then turned around and vanished into the snowy night.

This palace hall's location was superb. It was not too remote, but it was very peaceful. Moreover, deep in the winter, this palace was still surrounded by green trees, which was highly unusual.

She was here? Based on the rumors, the Divine Empress doted on her, even more than she doted on the Princess of Ping.

Then if the Orthodoxy and the Imperial Court were to split and his martial uncle, the Pope, began to fight with the Divine Empress, she would definitely assist the Empress. What would he do then? Suddenly, he recalled those words of hers in the restaurant and realized that this really was a problem. He could forget it for a moment, but he couldn't leave it unconsidered forever.

The combination of snow and wind in front of this palace hall was quite cold. At the very beginning, his face had actually been quite hot, but now it was gradually beginning to cool. It wasn't because his passion had cooled, but he needed to be cool-headed.

He had come to see her, but he didn't move for a very long time. He had no intention of sneaking into this palace, only standing there.

He stood there for quite a while, unaware of the passing of time, until finally, a voice fell in his ear. It was her voice.

"You...what are you standing here for?"

He turned to the voice and saw that a window on the eastern wing of the palace was still bright. He walked over and saw her silhouette in the light.

She was sitting by a table next to the window, her hands holding a book.

It was late, but for some reason, she was not asleep, perhaps for the same reason he could not sleep.

"I...wanted to see you," he said to her from the window.

On the other side, Xu Yourong's gentle voice asked, "Didn't we just see each other?"

After hesitating for a few moments, Chen Changsheng replied, "But...I can't sleep."

Xu Yourong turned to the window, somewhat concerned. She

thought, just what happened to make him unable to sleep?

It must be known that back in the Garden of Zhou, even when countless terrifying monsters were lurking in the sea of grass around him, he would very calmly fall asleep.

"What's happened?"

"It's nothing...it's just that I can't sleep when I'm thinking about you."

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# Chapter 530 - Caught

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After hearing Chen Changsheng's words, Xu Yourong sat stunned in her position by the window for quite some time, not knowing how to respond.

In the Plains of the Unsetting Sun, they had experienced life-and-death situations together, stood side by side and back to back, and had also brushed away snow, so they had long understood each other's feelings. It was just that she had not known that he was a young Daoist boy from Xining Village, so after leaving the Garden of Zhou, she had also only thought about the promise she had made to him and prepared to end the engagement. But then, the Li Palace had announced to the world that the Sword Pool had reappeared and that many people had seen the swords from it. After making a few comparisons, she finally confirmed that he was him, finally understood that fate toyed with people's hearts, even playing such a joke on her.

But what did that matter? As long as he was him, she clearly understood what she desired. On the Bridge of Helplessness and sitting by the pot eating ribs, she had been waiting for him to say something, but he had never said it. Only now, at such a late hour, did he inexplicably appear by her window and speak those inexplicable words.

Fine, this really was like his path of the sword.

Just like Wang Po's path of the sword, very straight.

He had used his words to straightforwardly pierce through the window paper in front of her and straightforwardly bring her back to the Divine Path of the Mausoleum of Zhou.

Xu Yourong stood up and looked at his figure through the window, and then extended her hand to open the window.

The snowflakes were buffeted inside by the wind, falling upon her face with a slight chill.

"The [dilong](#) is burning too hot, the room is a little warm."

(A dilong 地龙, floor/earth dragon, was basically a variation of the kang where channels under the floor conducted heat into a room from a heat source that was elsewhere.)

She looked at Chen Changsheng and said this seemingly to explain why she had opened the window and met with him, but she had not noticed that this explanation was rather cute.

Chen Changsheng looked at her face, not noticing the nervousness she revealed as she gave this explanation that resulted in this cuteness. He just felt that she was very cute.

"I was just standing outside and also felt it was a little hot," he earnestly said.

It was currently in the depths of winter, in the dead of the night, the weather cold and the ground frozen, with snowflakes dancing in the air.



"How long have you been standing?" Xu Yourong asked as she looked at the snow on his body.

Chen Changsheng considered the question, then shook his head. "I forgot."

Xu Yourong asked, "Why didn't you just come in?"

Chen Changsheng answered, "I was afraid of disturbing your rest, and...Shuang'er should also be here, right? I was worried that she would see us and say something."

Xu Yourong asked, "Then do you want to come in now?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "No need, I came...because there's actually something I want to give you."

Saying this, he slipped off the string of stone pearls from his wrist and very carefully snapped it. He then stuck his hand into the window and said, "There are ten in total. Pick five."

In truth, he had long forgotten that there had been no agreement between them to divide up the treasures of the Mausoleum of Zhou. He simply believed it was only right and proper that since they had discovered the Mausoleum of Zhou together, anything they found in the Mausoleum of Zhou should be divided evenly, whether it was the Halving Blade Style or these ten stone pearls.

"This is..." Xu Yourong's curious voice suddenly halted and she raised her head to look at him and say in a somewhat incredulous voice, "This is those ten...that were around the Mausoleum of Zhou?"

If this were some other expert, even a Prefect of the Orthodoxy like Linghai Zhiwang, they would be unable to see anything wrong with these seemingly ordinary stone pearls, because these stone pearls truly emanated no Qi whatsoever. However, she had begun studying the Heavenly Tome Monoliths when she was little more than ten, and she had personally seen these Heavenly Tome Monoliths in the Garden of Zhou, so she was naturally able to sense that something was different about them.

"Yeah." Chen Changsheng looked back at her and said, "The Garden of Zhou has not disappeared. If you want to go back and take a look, I can bring you in."

He didn't describe it as 'entering the Garden of Zhou', instead asking if she wanted to go back. This was because to him and her, the Garden of Zhou was truly too important.

Upon hearing that the Garden of Zhou had not collapsed and that he could even enter it, Xu Yourong was astounded.

But the truly important thing was still those stone pearls in his palm.

She solemnly asked him, "You truly plan to give them to me?"

Chen Changsheng solemnly replied, "Without you, I would already be dead, and then how would I have possibly been able to find the Mausoleum of Zhou, let alone the Sword Pool?"

Xu Yourong thought about it, then casually picked out five stone pearls and swiftly stowed them away in the Tong Palace.

She felt that Chen Changsheng's argument made sense, so she very calmly accepted them, like the gentle wind and faint clouds, right and proper, frank and upright.

What Chen Changsheng most admired and most loved about her was this sort of temperament.

"Then I'll go now."

Entering the palace in the snowy night, the window being opened, seeing her, and even giving her the stone pearls—everything he needed to do had been done, and now it was naturally time to return. This was what it meant to come in high spirits, but leave upon losing interest, the so-called elegance of a distinguished scholar...but he was a youth, not a distinguished scholar, so he said he was going to go, but his feet did not move.

Xu Yourong said, "Go back first."

Chen Changsheng affirmed, but his feet still did not move, and he still did nothing but look at her.

She slightly turned, almost as if she wished to avoid his gaze, but in reality, she was leaning out the window.

The closer she got, the more nervous he became.

She extended her hand and brushed the snow off his shoulder, just like how she had brushed the leaves off his shoulder on the Divine Path.

It was very gentle, very calm, very familiar, very composed.

The paper of the window had long been pierced through, even the window had been opened, but he still needed a final confirmation.

The action of brushing away snow was this confirmation.

Chen Changsheng felt like his severed meridians had all been healed and his body brimmed with vigor. As he looked at her, his eyes glowed with light.

Xu Yourong did not look him in the eyes, instead gazing off into the snowy night, feeling her face to be somewhat hot. She softly whispered, "Tomorrow, I want to go to the Orthodox Academy and look around."

Chen Changsheng no longer had any hesitation, turning around and walking into the snowy night.

He was very sure now that he would definitely be able to sleep this time.

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At five in the morning, Chen Changsheng woke up, used five breaths of time to steady his mind, then opened his eyes. After washing his face and mouth and putting on his clothes, he went on a run around the lake.

If one carefully calculated, he had not even slept for four hours. Strangely enough, he was bursting with energy, bearing none of the black bags that were often seen under Tang Thirty-Six's eyes, and his feet seemed to be borne along by the wind.

As time passed, more and more students began to run along the lakeshore, but none of them were faster than him and some would occasionally be lapped by him. When those students that had been lapped saw him, they would hurriedly bow.

No matter how young he was, he was still the principal, let alone the fact that he had been affirmed last night as candidate for Pope. As a result, the students were even more reverential than normal.

He, on the other hand, could not see any difference. He calmly returned their greetings with even more patience than usual.

In the small cafeteria across the lake, the breakfast being served was golden millet porridge, but he couldn't tell any difference between it and regular millet porridge. Not even when Xuanyuan Po took the Mountain Sea Sword from the pile of firewood and flaunted it in front of him, saying how in his practice last night, he had succeeded in attracting thunder and lightning, was Chen Changsheng able to see any difference in the Mountain Sea Sword compared to when it had first emerged from the Sword Pool in the Garden of Zhou.

In brief, he was rather scatterbrained. From time to time, his gaze would flit over in the direction of the Imperial Palace.

"You're not sick, are you?" Tang Thirty-Six asked, yawning.

Chen Changsheng came to his senses and, seeing the two black bags around Tang Thirty-Six's eyes, returned, "I think that you might be sick."

Tang Thirty-Six angrily thought, if it weren't for the fact that I had been keeping an eye on your sick self half the night but ended up getting too tired and sleeping in the snow, there's no way my energy would be so lacking right now.

The reason Chen Changsheng looked in the direction of the Imperial Palace was because last night, she said she wanted to come, and he was waiting for her.

Of course, he wanted to tell the story of the relationship between

him and Xu Yourong to others, especially his friends.

Tang Thirty-Six had always been his best confidant, but Xu Yourong had said that she did not want him to tell others, so he could only hold it in.

After breakfast, he washed his face and brushed his teeth again, changed into a clean set of clothes, and stood by the window, waiting.

It was only because he was normally so obsessed with cleanliness that this did not attract the attention of the rest of the Orthodox Academy.

After waiting for some time, he heard the cry of a crane from the distance.

He followed the crane's cry, and it didn't take too long before he saw the White Crane deep within the winter forest, as well as she who had come riding on the crane.

Xu Yourong was still wearing that big cotton jacket from yesterday, but this didn't make her seem unrefined. Instead, she gave off a warm and gentle impression.

Probably because she did not want others to see, she used the secret technique of South Stream Temple to make her appearance much plainer, just as she had done in the Garden of Zhou.

Seeing her normal and average face, Chen Changsheng did not despair, but instead felt even closer to her.

Perhaps it was this closeness that let him rediscover the willingness to casually converse with her like he did in the Garden of Zhou.

He examined that big cotton jacket that made her seem especially cute and, after hesitating for a while, screwed up the courage to say a few words.

"The smell of beef ribs is very strong. Do you want to change into a new set of clothes? Maybe you want to wear some of mine first and I'll help you wash yours?"

Xu Yourong stared at him, stunned, then she became truly angry and ashamed, and began to turn around and walk back towards the White Crane.

Chen Changsheng quickly came to his senses and felt his way of doing things was truly ridiculous. He quickly caught up with her and then constantly made hand signals towards the White Crane.

The White Crane was old friends with him. Without waiting for Xu Yourong, it flew off with a cry.

Xu Yourong stood in the snow, stunned once more.

Starting from two years ago, she failed to understand why the



White Crane was so close to Chen Changsheng and treated him with such kindness.

"Back then, just what did you do to it?"

She looked at Chen Changsheng and asked, "Why is he listening to you?"

This was the first time the two talked about their childhood.

"I mentioned it before in the letters we wrote to each other when we were small, you just forgot." As Chen Changsheng thought about this matter, he felt rather unwell, but when he thought about what had just occurred, this unwellness all transformed into unease. "I misspoke a moment ago, don't be angry. Just think about those words Tang Tang said."

The 'words' being mentioned here were naturally those of Tang Thirty-Six calling him a pig.

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[The White Crane had gone off forever](#), the winter forest was devoid of people and free to wander about.

(This is a reference to the poem "Yellow Crane Tower" by Cui Hao. The original line is 'Once the yellow crane left it will never

return, for one thousand years the clouds wandered carelessly'.)

The snowflakes slowly descended. Under the umbrella, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong strolled through the secluded forest of the Orthodox Academy.

"I, Zhexiu, and the others all live here." Chen Changsheng brought her to the forest's edge and pointed at the nearby house.

As he spoke, he recalled that she had visited the Orthodox Academy on that night and might have even seen that scene in the restaurant across the street. He explained, "Don't misunderstand, on that day, Tang Tang insisted on dragging me and Su Moyu there. Su Moyu was once part of the Li Palace Academy, thirty-third on the Proclamation of Azure Sky, so you might have heard about him before. Right now, he's also with us."

His words had touched on two topics. He had spoken very naturally, and his words also naturally contained the pride of youth, like he was showing off his accomplishments to her.

Suddenly, a voice rang out from the winter forest.

"I knew something was up with you! It's no wonder you didn't even touch the hand of that girl when she was in your bosom that night. As it turns out...you actually had a lover!"

As the voice rang out, a pile of snow suddenly burst apart and Tang Thirty-Six stood up from it.

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## Chapter 531 - At First Sight

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Tang Thirty-Six was covered all over in snow, his face pale, the black bags around his eyes extremely heavy, and he looked haggard to the extreme. In these past two days, in order to find out Chen Changsheng's secret, he had racked his brains for ideas and skipped eating and sleeping. Indeed, after painstaking effort, even using two magical artifacts of the Wenshui Tangs, he was finally able to conceal the Qi from his body and catch Chen Changsheng in the act.

"Hahahaha!" The forest echoed with his laughter. Then, he walked up to Chen Changsheng, his laughter instantly vanishing as he furiously criticized, "Isn't this going a bit too far, forgetting your friends when you're in love? For what reason do you need to badmouth me, to contrast it with your lofty purity? Just a moment ago in the snow, I heard you mention my name quite a few times, but not a single word of it was good!"

"Eh, this umbrella is rather strange." Tang Thirty-Six's gaze moved down from the umbrella and fell upon the couple. Feeling proud of himself again, he heartily laughed then said, "The matter of the engagement hasn't even been cleared up yet, and you're actually in the mood to walk under an umbrella through the snow! I'll have you know, that Phoenix is quite proud. If she were to know that you found a girl, then..."

He was just preparing to threaten Chen Changsheng into signing a series of unfair agreements when his gaze fell on the girl under the umbrella, causing him to subconsciously pause. For some inexplicable reason, he found this girl quite familiar, even though he had clearly never seen her before.

The snowy forest became abnormally quiet. The more Tang Thirty-Six stared at this girl, the graver his expression became.

This girl was about fifteen, precisely in the period where her beauty was budding. Her face was delicate and pretty, but nothing out of the ordinary. The jacket she was wrapped in seemed very ordinary, but it was actually made of the most expensive thirteen-thread cotton. Her two eyebrows were as slender as willow leaves, and it was obvious that the most extravagant orange jasmine had been used to draw her eyebrows. And if he wasn't wrong, even that hairpin casually stuck in her hair was more expensive than all the clothes and shoes Chen Changsheng had worn throughout his entire life added together. Of course, what drew his attention the most was still that girl's eyes. Even after being teased, they were still so calm, definitely not the eyes of some ordinary person.

He had planned to joke about Chen Changsheng's taste, but now he realized that there was actually nothing to complain about with regards to this girl's taste or temperament.

Of course, this girl's taste and temperament, as well as that wealth beyond words hidden within the fine details, could only have been picked out by a young heir to a noble family like him who also possessed wealth beyond words.

No matter what, a young Daoist from the countryside like Chen Changsheng would never be able to see these details. This is what was meant to cast pearls before swine, to aim a fluid glance at a blind man.

Just who was this girl? Tang Thirty-Six thought through all his distantly-related older cousins as well as the young ladies of all the noble houses of the continent, but he failed to find an answer. He was suddenly overtaken by a fierce sense of unease and wariness. He didn't know where Chen Changsheng had gotten to know such a noblewoman, but he was worried that Chen Changsheng was being deceived.

Tang Thirty-Six looked at her cold expression and asked, "Might I dare ask for the young lady's...hic!"

But before he could finish, he was interrupted by a sudden hiccup.

He looked at the girl, his face a picture of absolute shock. His hand held his stomach like he was choking. He thought about how, in the pile of snow, he had heard the cry of a crane, and he had also heard Chen Changsheng explain what had happened that night. Thus, he thought of a possibility, a possibility that he had rejected last night with a mocking tone and an attitude of absolute certainty.

"You..." He looked at her, his mouth agape, for a long time unable to say the rest of the sentence. He was forced to turn to Chen Changsheng and ask, "Her?"

Chen Changsheng nodded.

Tang Thirty-Six's body went stiff. He turned once more to Xu Yourong, his eyes filled with shock.

At this time, Chen Changsheng was also truly astounded. It was completely beyond his imagination that this fellow, in order to find out his secrets, would exert such massive efforts.

He was somewhat concerned about Xu Yourong's mood, so he looked at her and explained, "This guy..."

"Tang Tang, you can also...hic...call me Tang Thirty-Six."

Outside of expectations, Tang Thirty-Six was very quickly able to calm back down. He very naturally introduced himself to Xu Yourong, it was just that he paused in the middle.

This was because he was still choking somewhat, and the sound in the middle was a hiccup.

Xu Yourong knew that this young master of the Wenshui Tang clan was Chen Changsheng's best friend, the current superintendent of the Orthodox Academy, and also...the new owner of Clear Lake Restaurant.

Tang Thirty-Six solemnly said, "I have seen the Holy Maiden."

Xu Yourong softly replied, "No need for such courtesy."

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "It is said that when the Holy Maiden lived in the capital, she enjoyed eating the blue lobster of Clear

Lake Restaurant?"

Xu Yourong calmly gazed at him, a smile in her eyes as if she had guessed at what was about to happen.

Just as expected, Tang Thirty-Six next said, "In a little while, I'll send someone...hic...to send blue lobster to the Divine General's estate. Once Your Eminence returns to Holy Maiden Peak, I'll have...hic...Clear Lake...hic...Restaurant directly ship it to you by sea. All four seasons of the year, I'll...hic...guarantee it."

Xu Yourong replied, "This will trouble Young Master Tang."

Tang Thirty-Six waved his hand. "We're all part of...hic...the same family, no need for such...hic...courtesy."

His appearance was very natural, free and at ease, his heroism soaring to the clouds, yet his hiccups never ceased throughout his talk.

In truth, this was also a feat worthy of admiration. He was constantly hiccupping yet still managed to so calmly conclude this conversation.

On the side, Chen Changsheng watched and thought, I guess this is the benefit of having a thick skin?

Xu Yourong said, "Let's chat again in the future."



Tang Thirty-Six withdrew his smile and said, "Whenever the Holy Maiden pleases."

Chen Changsheng raised up the umbrella to cover Xu Yourong's head, then the two began walking to some other place in the forest.

As he passed Tang Thirty-Six, the two exchanged glances containing countless questions and wariness.

"Don't speak of this matter to anyone else."

"Relax, who am I?"

As Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong walked several dozen zhang through the falling snow, Tang Thirty-Six still stood where he was, smiling and waving his hands. He maintained the posture of saying goodbye: the curve of his smile and the range in which he waved his hand were all perfect, perfectly displaying the courtesy and accumulated experience of a young master of a noble clan.

Xu Yourong whispered, "This friend of yours is a truly wondrous (妙) person."

Chen Changsheng thought, where did this word come from? Is it the 'wondrous' (妙) from 'unfathomably mysterious' (莫名其妙)?

Only when Tang Thirty-Six watched their two figures disappear

into the forest and could no longer see them did he finally relax.

With some difficulty, he walked over to a tree, stuck out his hands to support himself on it, then began to hiccup without end with a much higher frequency than when he was talking.

After this period, he finally truly calmed down and his shocked emotions finally truly began to settle.

He let out a strange shout and hugged the tree, then began to complain about Chen Changsheng and himself.

It was just at this moment that Xuanyuan Po finished his morning practice and walked out from the depths of the forest. He just so happened to see the crazy scene of Tang Thirty-Six hugging the tree and couldn't help but be surprised.

"Don't you normally tell me that hitting trees is particularly childish? Why are you also working with trees today?"

Tang Thirty-Six continued to hug the tree, unwilling to let go. He sobbed, "I've already acted so shamelessly today; what's another shameless act on top of it?"

In truth, Chen Changsheng had never understood what the name 'Xu Yourong' meant to the young men of the world. Although Tang Thirty-Six, because of the engagement and his friendship with Chen Changsheng, did not adore Xu Yourong like the vast majority of the young men in the world, such as the Demon Lord's son, she

was still Xu Yourong!

And then what had he done? Like a little urchin, he had buried himself under the snow to eavesdrop on their conversation and then said bad things about her behind her back. This morning, he didn't have time to wash his face or even brush his teeth, and the bags under his eyes were so heavy...he had never felt so ashamed in his life and he wished he could do nothing more than hug this tree for the rest of his life.

Suddenly, Tang Thirty-Six turned around and looked at Xuanyuan Po, saying, "They just met for the first time yesterday, so how can they be walking around today with each other? Moreover, looking at their appearance, although they deliberately kept a hand's width of distance between them, this sort of deliberation is a problem in itself!"

As he spoke, he stuck out his right hand in a fist and compared it with Xuanyuan Po. Afterwards, he sneered, "What a fine couple, purposely acting calm so that they could conceal it from my insight? Who am I? How could I not see that passionate and illicit appearance of theirs!"

Xuanyuan Po had simply no idea what was going on and found him quite strange. "You've gone crazy!"

Ordinarily, upon hearing such an honest assessment, Tang Thirty-Six would absolutely not have taken it lying down, but now, his mind was completely occupied with that just-departed couple. Looking at Xuanyuan Po, he very seriously asked, "Do you believe in love at first sight?"

Xuanyuan Po replied, "In the tribe, after the first meeting, we usually get married. Does that count?"

Tang Thirty-Six was almost at a loss for words. He asked back, "Do you think it counts?"

Xuanyuan Po contemplated the question very seriously, finally saying without much confidence, "I think...it should count?"

Tang Thirty-Six thought, it's really impossible to chat with this person. After leaving the forest, he returned to the house, pushed open the door, and immediately asked, "Do you believe in love at first sight?"

# Chapter 532 - Returning The Umbrella And Asking For The Way Out

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Zhexiu was by the window, a model of loneliness, longing for some person. Upon hearing Tang Thirty-Six's question, he fell in a daze, very naturally thinking about many things—at the Grand Examination, in that bitter battle in the Tower of Purging Dust, the anger and bashfulness revealed on his opponent's face when his hand attacked their chest. Later on, they had lived together under the same roof in the Mausoleum of Books, letting him vaguely guess at something but not dare voice his suspicions. Later still, they met once more in the Garden of Zhou and he carried her on his back and ran towards the setting sun.

As he thought about these things, the corners of his lips turned up and he revealed a warm smile.

Tang Thirty-Six was completely unable to expect that this wolf youth famed for being unfeeling and ruthless would show such an emotion on his face. For a moment, he was dumbstruck. Holding his forehead, he thought, just what's gone wrong with this world? Xu Yourong is actually dating Chen Changsheng while Zhexiu is yearning for love!

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"Tang Tang is very similar to a person."

"Senior Su Li."

Chen Changsheng very naturally gave out the correct answer, then exchanged glances with Xu Yourong and laughed.

At this point, they had already left the Orthodox Academy and come to the Hundred Flowers Lane outside it. Snow was falling from the sky and under the Yellow Paper Umbrella, it was very difficult for them to be seen by others.

In fact, from the moment they met at Fortune Peace Road yesterday, Chen Changsheng desperately wanted to ask why the Yellow Paper Umbrella was in her possession. After all, this umbrella was his. However, regardless of how ignorant he was of worldly affairs, given that he had just made a mistake a moment ago, he knew that he could not ask the question this way, so he could only endure it for now.

Holding up the umbrella, they walked through the wind and snow along the eastern bank of the Luo River. After crossing Eight Willows Lane, they arrived at the Bridge of Helplessness. It was only natural that they began to think about yesterday's battle.

"If at that time, I knew you were my opponent, would the result be different?"

Standing on the center of the snowy bridge, Chen Changsheng whispered as he gazed in the direction she had come from yesterday.

Xu Yourong replied, "From the very beginning, you never had any intentions of winning."

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng said, "Because of the matter of annulling the engagement, I always felt that I was being somewhat unfair to you."

Xu Yourong faintly smiled but said nothing.

"Your cultivation level is above mine, so it was always difficult for me to win, and also...I don't like acting according to the plans of others."

Chen Changsheng turned to gaze through the snow at the distant Li Palace.

On that spring day almost two years ago, he left, humiliated, from the Divine General of the East's state. On another, smaller bridge, he had once sighed with similar emotion.

He cultivated the Dao of following his heart. His fate was not good, so he wished even more to grasp it in his hands.

"No one likes the feeling of being part of fate's plans." Xu Yourong turned in the other direction towards the Imperial Palace. "But yesterday, I really did want to fight with you, because I wanted to know what level your sword had reached. Moreover, I wanted to win in a fair and upright fashion. I don't like the feeling

of losing."

Yesterday, in the beef rib restaurant on Fortune Peace Road, she had said something similar, but today, she spoke more seriously and openly, her words unvarnished.

The two descended from the snowy bridge. As it was snowing, there weren't many people walking on the bridge. Only a stall selling tanghulu on the side was surrounded by people and seemed rather lively. The majority of this crowd were idlers with nothing to do. They were currently discussing yesterday's battle and chatting about all sorts of gossip.

Like the engagement, like showing mercy, like being in love, like being merciless, and there were even a few quite shocking jeers.

Those idlers were clueless to the fact that the two subjects of their conversation were standing by their side.

Xu Yourong's head was slightly lowered, Chen Changsheng's slightly raised. Once more, they walked across the bridge, but this time they were not enemies, so what were they?

The snow was falling faster, and although it could not be described as fierce, it was enough to gradually confuse the eyes. The pedestrians on the street grew fewer and fewer, the eaves on the roof and brims of the wells being layered thicker and thicker with snow. The streets and alleys of the capital were transformed into an expanse of white. The original colors of the building peeking out from the snow were like clean lines on a white sheet of



paper, very pleasing to the eye.

The snow on the stone pillars of the Li Palace was like white hats on top of slender stone men.

The Mausoleum of Books was still verdant and lush, except that the Divine Path, burdened with snow, seemed like a frozen waterfall.

No person came to disturb the small courtyard of the Plum Garden Inn. It was very serene, the snow-covered ground like a piece of felt. They couldn't bear to step on it, so they stood under the porch, gazing at the tree in the very center of the courtyard while they chatted about the excitement he felt two years ago when he first saw the rubbings of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths as well as the bamboo dragonfly.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong used the entire day to walk the entire capital, going to many places and speaking about many things.

For the majority of the time, he who was unskilled with words was speaking, introducing the places they visited: the loneliness of the Lingyan Pavilion, the Night Pearls of the Dew Platform. He very seriously carried out the role of tour guide, wishing for her tour to be all the happier.

From beginning to end, Xu Yourong listened quietly at his side, a smile on her lips.

These were all places she had played until she was bored in as a child, even the Mausoleum of Books and the Imperial Palace. She had even treated the stone pillars of the Li Palace as slides.

There was no way she required a youth who had lived his childhood in Xining Village to explain it to her.

Chen Changsheng had originally known about these things, but he forgot.

She knew that he must have forgotten, but she didn't want to remind him.

At dusk, they finally returned to Hundred Flowers Lane. At the back wall of the Orthodox Academy, Chen Changsheng wanted to return the Yellow Paper Umbrella to her, but she shook her head.

"Martial Uncle Su wanted me to give this umbrella to you."

Chen Changsheng was very happy, thinking, I and Senior Su Li argued about this matter for tens of thousands of li, but now it seems that Senior has finally recognized his error.

He sent his spiritual sense into the handle of the umbrella and suddenly noticed a problem. In shock, he asked, "What about the sword in the umbrella?"

The foundation of the Yellow Paper Umbrella was that sword of Mount Li's Sect Master that was the only sword in the past

thousand years to break out of the Sword Pool on its own, the Heaven Shrouding Sword that had once shaken the entire continent.

Back on the snowy plains of the demon realm, when Su Li had pulled it out of the umbrella, such was its might that one stroke had been enough to slay a Demon General, and one more was enough to slash open a path to survival.

But now this Heaven Shrouding Sword was clearly no longer within the umbrella.

"Martial Uncle said, the umbrella could be given to you, but the sword came from Mount Li and couldn't be given to you. He gave the Heaven Shrouding Sword..."

Xu Yourong paused, then continued, "To Senior Brother."

She didn't state that it had been given to that senior brother of the Mount Li Sword Sect, but Chen Changsheng knew that she was definitely speaking of Qiushan Jun.

This was the first time either of them had touched upon the name of Qiushan Jun.

Chen Changsheng felt somewhat uncomfortable, perhaps because of how naturally she had said the words 'senior brother', perhaps because it was his name that had been paired with hers in the past several years, or perhaps it was because he had grown up

and cultivated the Dao with her and was truthfully much more familiar with her than Chen Changsheng was.

"What's wrong?" Xu Yourong asked, inclining her head.

Chen Changsheng's head was lowered as he gazed at the umbrella in his hands, as if he was studying something. He casually responded, "It's nothing."

The two seemed somewhat ignorant, but in reality, they understood everything.

"Martial Uncle Su also wanted me to bring you two letters."

Xu Yourong took from her bosom two letters and held them out in front of him.

For some reason, as her fingers gripped the letters, her brow was slightly creased.

The instant Chen Changsheng took the letters, he felt like his fingertips had become pincushions, pain piercing through his body. At once, he moved his spiritual sense to forcefully suppress the impulse to throw these letters away.

These two letters contained a monstrous sword intent!

He glanced in astonishment at Xu Yourong.

Xu Yourong nodded. Pointing at the two letters in his hand, she said, "Martial Uncle Su said that you could open the yellow envelope at any time. The black envelope, on the other hand, you should keep safe. In the future, if you encounter any situation you find impossible to resolve, open it then."

In the Garden of Zhou, the Heaven Shrouding Sword's sword intent and sword body had reunited. Outside the Garden of Zhou, Su Li and this sword had reunited. That grandmaster of the path of the sword, because of this lucky chance, once more experienced an increase in power, cultivating to unknown heights of strength on the path of the sword.

He now no longer needed the Heaven Shrouding Sword. He wanted to go traveling with the Holy Maiden, so he left the Heaven Shrouding Sword to Qiushan Jun and the Yellow Paper Umbrella to Chen Changsheng.

This seemed very fair, but it wasn't really. Although the Yellow Paper Umbrella was an incredibly potent defensive magical artifact, how could it be discussed on par with the famed Heaven Shrouding Sword?

However, Chen Changsheng had no complaints. In the end, the Heaven Shrouding Sword was the sword of Mount Li's Sect Master. It was only right and proper that it be left at Mount Li.

He carefully put the two letters away. Thinking of that senior who had already gone far away, he suddenly felt rather emotional,

felt like he missed him.

On the tens of thousands of li from the snowy plains to the south, he and Su Li had experienced much together. Although, in terms of cultivation and generation, the two were incomparably distant, they could be considered to be friends in spite of the vast difference in age.

"Just where did he and the Holy Maiden go?"

"A very distant place."

"The Great Western Continent?"

"Even farther than the Great Western Continent."

This answer was somewhat surprising, yet it was also within reason.

To the ordinary people of the continent, the lonely Great Western Continent in the ocean was already the most distant place, but Su Li had traveled the world for several centuries and had presumably already visited long ago.

Now, for the sake of humanity's future, in an extremely free and easy manner, he had placed down all his grudges and hostility and taken the Holy Maiden to drift far away. Of course, they had to go to an even farther place.

But was there a place even farther than the Great Western Continent?

Chen Changsheng recalled some extremely obscure records within the Daoist Canon and asked Xu Yourong in shock, "Could there really be other continents?"

The records within the Daoist Canon concerning other continents were not at all like the personal experiences of travelers. The writings were exceptionally ambiguous, seeming more like conjectures.

To be well-read in the Daoist Canon did not mean that one knew all things about the world, because there were many things that were not, or could not be, recorded in words.

Xu Yourong was the current Holy Maiden. As a child, she had grown up and studied in places like the Li Palace, the Imperial Palace, and South Stream Temple, so she naturally knew a bit more.

"It should be the Sacred Light Continent." She explained to Chen Changsheng, "I heard Teacher say that on the other side of the sea of stars, on the incomparably distant other shore, is another continent. That world is bathed in light and inhabited by beings very similar to us. But the sea of stars is vast and impassable. If one does not pass through the sea of stars, there still exists an extremely firm spatial barrier between the two continents. Only experts that have stepped into the Divine Domain have the

opportunity to break through this barrier and enter the world on the other side."

Amazed, Chen Changsheng asked, "You're sure?"

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# Chapter 533 - Su Li's Letters

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"I was guessing." Xu Yourong gazed towards the distant horizon that was muddled with the twilight and snowflakes, her small face revealing a faint sense of longing. "Since such powerful figures as Teacher and Martial Uncle decided to leave this world, besides a place of legends like the Sacred Light Continent, where would they go?"

Chen Changsheng fell silent, then asked, "How do you get to the Sacred Light Continent?"

How do you get to Fortune Peace Road? How do you get to the Bridge of Helplessness? How do you get to the Orthodox Academy? How do you get to the Li Palace? How do you get to the place that exists only in legends?

This question was truthfully rather preposterous, but his expression was very serious.

Xu Yourong was also very serious. She diligently recalled that conversation the Divine Empress and her teacher had when she was small.

After a very long time, a little unsure, she spoke two words, "Cloud Grave?"

Chen Changsheng fell silent once more. This silence persisted for much longer than the previous one.

The Cloud Grave was the grave of all the clouds of the world, a most remote region of the continent. The region was bereft of sunlight year-round and was incomparably enigmatic and unknown. But he was very familiar with the Cloud Grave. He knew that without the boundless clouds and mist was an incomparably tall mountain. This mountain pierced through the clouds, its final destination unknown. Because this mountain was in the three hundred li behind Xining Village, he had once gone there. He knew that in the mists and clouds of the wetland encircling the peak were countless fierce monsters, countless dangerous and murderous cultivators, as well as several noble clans of previous dynasties who lived out bitter lives.

Only today did he know that this mountain might be a path to other worlds.

"In the future, can we go to the Sacred Light Continent and look around?" he asked of Xu Yourong.

Even if the legend was real, even if there really was a place on the other side of the sea of stars called the Sacred Light Continent, since no one knew about it, it might be the case that there was simply no one who had been able to successfully break through that spatial barrier and discover that other world. He and Xu Yourong were cultivating geniuses, but they were still far away from the Divine Domain. To them, the Sacred Light Continent was nothing more than an ethereal name and some speculations. Yet he had so seriously sent out his invitation, perhaps several centuries in advance.

At this point, he had long forgotten the fact that it was highly likely that he wouldn't be able to live past twenty.

Xu Yourong smiled and agreed. "Fine."

Chen Changsheng thought to himself that it truly was fine.

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Upon returning to the Orthodox Academy and walking into the first floor of the house, he found to his surprise that the door to Zhexiu's room was open and Su Moyu and the rest were all inside.

"What are you guys talking about?" he asked with curiosity as he walked in.

Su Moyu replied, "Ever since this morning, Tang Tang has been finding people and asking them whether 'love at first sight' is actually something that can happen in this world."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at Chen Changsheng and bitterly laughed.

Chen Changsheng grew nervous and asked back, "How did you guys end up randomly talking about this?"

"Who knows, he started acting all strange today." Feeling somewhat wronged, Xuanyuan Po complained, "I seriously answered, but all I got from him was a round of curses."

Standing by the window, Zhexiu suddenly asked, "Su Li left, but she should still be at Mount Li, right?"

Chen Changsheng was given a scare, believing that his meeting with Xu Yourong had been uncovered. In the next moment, he realized that this was a request for confirmation.

"The news brought by the southern diplomatic mission should not be mistaken."

As Tang Thirty-Six spoke, he once more shot a glance at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng ignored him, asking Zhexiu with concern, "What do you plan to do?"

In the present Orthodox Academy, from its principal and superintendent all the way to its head of housekeeping and academic advisor, all were extremely young, none exceeding the age of twenty. They were all youths and so were naturally most concerned about that beauty and sadness most entrenched in the minds of youths—besides the engagement and battle between Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong, there was also the story of Zhexiu and Qi Jian.

Zhexiu looked out the window at the snow, a tinge of ferocity flickering across his weather-beaten yet still somewhat young and inexperienced face.

"After I finish with everything in the capital, I'm going to Mount Li to pick her up."

Chen Changsheng and the rest looked at each other in dismay. They had clearly heard that Zhexiu had not used the word 'see', but the word 'pick'.

They could almost see the countless battles that would take place on Mount Li in the future and those speckles of wolf blood.

This was Zhexiu looking for death, but the problem was that there was as of yet no one in this world that could prevent from seeking his death.

Tang Thirty-Six did not want Zhexiu to descend into madness. Sending a signal to Su Moyu with his eyes, he asked, "What do you need to do in the capital?"

Su Moyu tacitly understood, thinking, regardless of how he responds, we should talk up the difficulty of the matter. Only this way can we delay from sending off Zhexiu to his death at Mount Li.

"I want to kill Zhou Tong." Zhexiu turned and looked at them all with an emotionless expression.

The room was very quiet.

Tang Thirty-Six said nothing for a while, then finally stated, "Then let's just break it up for now. In any case, this isn't something that can be resolved in just eight or ten years."

Not long after they all dispersed, he came to Chen Changsheng's room and, without the slightest concern for his body caked with mud and snow, impolitely sat on that bed so clean that it was hard to even find a hair. He then pointed at Chen Changsheng and said with almost absolute certainty, "There is no such thing in the world as love at first sight."

Chen Changsheng glanced at the muddy water dripping from his clothes, controlled his emotions, and asked, "Just what do you want to say?"

"Ah, I didn't speak accurately enough. Of course, there's a possibility that you fell in love with Xu Yourong at first sight. A guy like Qiushan Jun, so perfect that even I'm a little jealous of him, has a deeply-rooted affection for her, so it's no surprise that a little kid who's never experienced romance would fall in love."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and continued, "But it's impossible for her to fall in love with you at first sight, so there's something fishy about this matter."

Chen Changsheng didn't care very much about this problem, but he was just rather curious. "Why is it that she can't?"

Tang Thirty-Six pointed at the dressing table by the wall, saying, "Go look in a mirror."

Chen Changsheng obediently walked over and examined himself in a mirror. "I'm not ugly."

Tang Thirty-Six's mouth dropped, powerless to speak.

He once more confirmed that Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng really were people that made others speechless.

As Chen Changsheng looked at himself in the mirror, he chuckled.

Tang Thirty-Six angrily roared, "In any case, it's impossible for her to fall in love with you just after seeing you on the Bridge of Helplessness! Even if she imagined you countless times because of the engagement, it's still impossible, because it's not that you're ugly, but you're far from being described as handsome, let alone as handsome as me!"

Chen Changsheng turned around to him and asked, "And then?"

Tang Thirty-Six stood up and walked in front of him. Staring into his eyes, he said, "I'm worried that she has some sort of plan for you."

No matter who it was, as long as they didn't know of that story of the Garden of Zhou, they would definitely think something was

wrong upon discovering that Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were dating.

Chen Changsheng understood, so he wasn't conflicted, much less angry. He attempted to ease these anxieties, saying, "Relax, there's nothing going on."

He spoke naturally, but firmly.

Seeing his expression, Tang Thirty-Six fell silent, then suddenly announced, "You've met before."

Chen Changsheng thought of Xu Yourong's order and shook his head.

Tang Thirty-Six sneered, "She would not fall in love with you at first sight, yet she still loves you. This can only mean that this was not your first meeting."

This conclusion could be said to be full of mistakes, yet invulnerable. Chen Changsheng didn't know what to do, attempting to explain, "We used to exchange letters when we were little, so we can't be considered strangers."

"Lie, you continue to lie," Tang Thirty-Six emotionlessly declared to him.

Chen Changsheng was truly at a loss. He very seriously requested, "You absolutely must keep this a secret. You can't tell



anyone else."

Tang Thirty-Six's face instantly relaxed. He moved forward to Chen Changsheng's shoulder, not forgetting to close the window, then raised his brow and said, "Who am I? You still can't rest assured around me?"

If all the details of this story, big and small, were to be narrated once more, how much time, how many words, how many...

After hearing what had happened in the Garden of Zhou, Tang Thirty-Six stood in a shocked daze for a very long time.

Finally, he looked at Chen Changsheng and once more sighed with that identical question, "Are you a pig?"

Chen Changsheng was quite ashamed, lacking any confidence to refute these words. He thought of another thing and stated, "I don't understand why she doesn't want me to tell of this matter to anyone else."

Tang Thirty-Six found himself without words to explain. "You don't understand? You truly are a pig."

After being insulted twice in succession, Chen Changsheng finally felt a bit uncomfortable. "Wasn't she the same in not recognizing me in the Garden of Zhou?"

"So they say that fate is ordained by the heavens, and you two are

called a match made in heaven."

Tang Thirty-Six opened the window. Gazing up at the starry sky after the snow had stopped and the clouds had dispersed, he deeply sighed.

Chen Changsheng was very happy at these words, saying, "Thank you for your blessing."

Tang Thirty-Six turned around and said sternly, "You and Xu Yourong are a pig husband and pig wife—of course you're very suitable for each other."

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Su Li's two letters were strange, a fact Chen Changsheng had affirmed the instant he had taken them. Thus, he had not opened them in front of Xu Yourong. He waited until late at night when no one was around to walk alone to the kitchen by the lake. After making his preparations, he used the Stainless Sword to open the letter.

The Stainless Sword could be called the sharpest sword in the world. It easily cut a thin line through the yellow envelope.

However, his brow still wrinkled because he could clearly sense that as the Stainless Sword cut through the envelope, it

encountered innumerable fine yet tenacious strands of Qi. Those strands of Qi were like strips of metal. If the Stainless Sword were not sharp, then it might have simply been impossible for him to open the letter with his current level of strength.

He took in a few deep breaths to calm his mind, then took the letter out of the envelope.

This was a very thin and commonplace sheet of paper, but when he unfolded it to read over it by the light of the fire, countless thin strands of sword intent shot out of the paper. They transformed into snowflakes like those outside and also like the willow leaves on the Luo River at the end of summer.

Swishswishswishswish! Countless sharp and even shrill sounds resounded about his body.

It was all sword intent. The iron pots on the stove were instantly cut into numberless pieces, the ceramic tiles embedded on the stove were cut into countless pieces, and soon after, the firewood in the kitchen was also cut into countless pieces. The blazing firewood in the kitchen oven was also cut into pieces, sending sparks everywhere. Even the burning flames seem to be cut into pieces.

Chen Changsheng stood within the room filled with sword intent, his expression grave, not daring to move a muscle.

# Chapter 534 - An Old Daoist Nun Arrives In The Capital

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Chen Changsheng had already prepared himself for the sword intent Su Li had concealed in the letter. His cultivation had improved much after his return to the capital, so at the very beginning, he planned to see how long he could resist it. Yet he had not imagined that the sword intents within the letter would be so sharp and terrifying. Let alone resisting, he didn't even dare provoke them.

Of course, Su Li had no hostility, much less killing intent, towards him. Those sword intents that had flown out of the letter noiselessly cut many items in the kitchen into pieces and had even cut off a floating piece of his belt, but not a single sword intent fell on his body. They only danced around him in the air.

Those sword intents danced around him like falling leaves, like snowflakes, like drops of water.

It was like Chen Changsheng was standing under an autumn tree, a snowy sky, or a waterfall.

He faintly understood some things and gradually relaxed, sending his spiritual sense into the world formed by these sword intents.

These sword intents were precisely the letter that Su Li had written him, one of the gifts that had been left behind for him. So just what was written within this letter?

On one side, Chen Changsheng comprehended the sword intents Su Li left behind after breaking through, while on the other side, he quietly read the letter in his hands.

Su Li's handwriting was just like his sword and like his person, flowing and lucid, joyful and sharp. The brush was raised with incredible speed and brought down with incredible accuracy.

"You were actually able to beat Yourong. This is truly some surprising news."

Upon seeing the first sentence of this letter, Chen Changsheng understood that Su Li giving him this letter had a condition: that he defeat Xu Yourong. If he had failed to do this, Su Li would definitely have been disappointed in him, then these two letters might have been left to Xu Yourong, or perhaps...Qiushan Jun.

"But when I think about how you learned the sword from me, then for you to scrape out a victory against Yourong is understandable."

The words in Su Li's letter still perfectly displayed his self-confidence, or perhaps his self-love.

Soon after, though, his words became much calmer and indifferent.

"In my life, I have only taught three people: Qiushan, you, and Qi

Jian. Qiushan is stronger than you; Qi Jian, weaker. Moreover, she's my daughter, so after I leave, if something happens at Mount Li, help me by taking care of it. As for why I left? After you live several hundred years and realize that someone has been waiting for you for several hundred years, perhaps you'll understand.

"I am the Junior Martial Uncle of Mount Li, so there's no need for me to explain a single thing to its disciples. I am Su Li, so there is nothing I need to tell to Old Man Yin and Tianhai. But I still want to explain some things, tell some things, so I wrote this sort of letter to you.

"In the future, if someone asks, you can relay these words to them. I have not conceded to this world, but she spoke true. I am Su Li—what need is there for me to be a second Zhou Dufu? Most importantly, you also spoke true. I've killed countless people and have no love for this world, but perhaps there is still a bit of kindness?"

As he read this sentence, Chen Changsheng's heart was filled with many emotions.

In the view of many, especially those southerners who opposed the confluence of north and south, Su Li and the Holy Maiden swiftly departing was an escape to shirk responsibility.

None of them understood that for a person like Su Li, only by wielding a truly wise and courageous sword could he truly cut open a path of departure.

But when he read the end of the letter, he suddenly felt that his praise and admiration of Senior Su Li had been mistaken.

Su Li had written something like this at the end of the letter.

"Have that wolf cub give it up. If he dares to pester my daughter again, even if I'm on the other side of the sea of stars, I'll ride a raft of stars back. My first strike will behead him, my second will behead you, and my final strike will annihilate your Orthodox Academy and that wolf tribe in the north. Don't say I didn't warn you!"

After Chen Changsheng read these words, he helplessly thought, why does a free and easy person like Senior Su Li take this matter so seriously?

As he thought this, the area around suddenly rang out with a dense and terrifying clattering of swords. Countless sword intents returned from every direction and fell back on the paper.

Those extremely sharp sword intents of nigh incomprehensible level cut the handwriting on the letter into complete disorder, transforming it into innumerable splatters of ink and making it impossible to make out the words.

Finally, those splatters of ink formed four big words.

"Burn promptly after reading."

Chen Changsheng could only vacantly gaze at these words. Wasn't it too much of a pity to just burn it like this? It must be known that the sword intent in this letter was an incredibly precious gift for cultivating the sword. He had originally planned to have Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu comprehend it tomorrow.

But since it was Su Li's order, he could not oppose it. He obediently threw the letter into the remaining embers in the kitchen oven, personally witnessing the letter transform into ash.

As he gazed at the ash in the oven and thought about the sword intent that was contained in that paper, he suddenly recalled that painter from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets who painted the scenes from when he challenged those initial level Star Condensation experts during the All-School Martial Exhibition. That painter most likely used a similar method, but comparing him to Su Li was like the difference between the mud and the clouds.

He then recalled that scribe he had seen on the street: the Heavenly Dao Academy's Guan Bai.

At the time, he had glanced at that man through the carriage window and felt a sharpness stab into his eyes and deliver an excruciating pain, almost causing him to cry.

Now that he thought about it, had this person cultivated on the path of the sword until his sword intent had become part of his body?



In next year's Boiling Stone Summit, he had to face such a powerful sword. Would he be able to win?

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A little earlier, Guan Bai was in a study in the south of the city, reading a book.

Suddenly, he sensed something. After a moment of silence, he quietly closed the book and walked out of the study.

After twilight, the snow had gradually come to a stop, but the weather was still chilly. It was difficult to walk on the snow-covered streets, so there were very few pedestrians.

He stood in the center of the street.

Confronting an old Daoist nun that was walking forward.

In truth, this Daoist nun's face could not be considered young. At the very least, a specific age could not be assigned to her. Her appearance was suffused with a cold and austere air, mixed with a strand of staleness.

Guan Bai watched as the old Daoist nun got closer and closer, not speaking a single word.

He did not know the origins of the nun, but he knew that her cultivation level was far above his, even above his esteemed teacher Zhuang Zhihuan.

Before the Boiling Stone Summit, he didn't want to cause too much trouble, nor should he be fighting an expert of such masterly cultivation.

But he had heard very clearly that in a distant alley, a wild dog had died.

It was just when this old Daoist nun was walking past.

This old Daoist nun was very powerful and assuredly had an extraordinary background. Compared to her, a wild dog blocking the road truly wasn't worth much.

Guan Bai also thought this way. If a wild dog died, so what? Was he really taking revenge for a single wild dog?

The problem was that the dog should have died faster.

The old Daoist nun would only need a glance to decapitate the wild dog.

But that dog had yelled out thirty-some times in the alley, each more miserable and weaker than the last, until it finally reached

his ears.

He found it impossible to understand why such a powerful figure as the old Daoist nun wanted to use thirty-some attacks to kill a single dog.

He also found it impossible to imagine whether or not this old Daoist nun acted this way when she normally killed people.

So he walked out from the study onto the street to ask this old Daoist nun.

The old Daoist nun halted her steps and expressionlessly gazed back at him.

Guan Bai wanted to say something, but upon seeing the old Daoist nun's eyes, he realized it was already impossible for him to speak.

His hand gripped the hilt of his sword, but he found it impossible to pull it out.

The old Daoist nun's eyes contained a sea of blue-green, filled with decay and ruthless emotion. It was like a tide filled with green seaweed charging forward.

[Boundless and endless](#) blue-green killing intent surged forward from her end of the street, enveloping his body.

(This is a play on a name. Wuqiong (无穷) means 'boundless'. 碧 is a color that might be green, blue, or blue-green.)

Squelch! A spray of blood shot out from his mouth and fell upon the snow.

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He was the pride of the Heavenly Dao Academy, an expert of the sword on the Proclamation of Liberation, Famous Name Guan Bai.

Yet in front of this old Daoist nun, he couldn't even say a single word or even pull out his sword before suffering heavy injuries.

"State your teacher," the old Daoist nun expressionlessly commanded.

Guan Bai's eyes were filled with shock. Only now did he confirm that this old Daoist nun's cultivation not only far surpassed his teachers, but had even faintly surpassed the scope of the mortal world and entered the Divine Domain. When he thought about the blue-green color in her eyes, he instantly guessed at her identity.

Wuqiong Bi of the Storms of the Eight Directions!

This was a peak expert of the human world. Why would she

suddenly appear tonight in the capital?

"Heavenly Dao Academy's Guan Bai. My teacher is Zhuang Zhihuan."

Guan Bai was shocked beyond compare by this old Daoist nun's identity, but he did not fear in the slightest, staring at her as he spoke.

"For the sake of Mao Qiuyu, I will leave you with your life tonight."

The old Daoist nun slowly walked past and her figure gradually faded into the darkness.

After not much time had passed, Guan Bai finally realized that he could move. The right hand gripping the hilt trembled, and with a clang, half of his sword emerged from its sheath.

Then, his right arm severed at the shoulder and fell on the snow, staining a large portion of it dark-red with blood.

Tonight, in the capital, a wild dog in an alley had been cruelly chopped to pieces.

Guan Bai, the pride and hope of the Heavenly Dao Academy, the young expert of the sword with limitless prospects, had lost the right arm that he used to wield the sword.

The old Daoist nun that had done both these things felt nothing for any of this. Her expression was still indifferent, her eyes still ruthless.

In her eyes, a young man like Guan Bai and that wild dog in the alley were not too different. Even she had to respect the Pope and she did not wish to provoke the Divine Empress, but if this were not the capital of the Great Zhou, perhaps Guan Bai would already be dead.

In her view, leaving Guan Bai his life was enough to give face to Mao Qiuyu. To be more precise, she was giving face to the Orthodoxy.

This world contained people that were extremely strong, so much so that their worldviews became somewhat twisted. They believed that if they did not steal all the food out of the beggar's bowl, they were giving the beggar face, and to not kill all the people that they found displeasing to the eye was to give life face. As a result, they believed that the other party should also give them face.

The old Daoist nun had come to the capital tonight because she believed that the Pope had not given her sufficient face, so she had come to personally take some face back.

When she was very young, she married another member of the Eight Storms. From that point on, she believed that her husband was her most important face. Later on, after much suffering, she

bore a son and believed that her son was actually her most important face.

The old Daoist nun stood at the back wall of the Orthodox Academy, emotionlessly looking up at those several snowy trees that peeked over the wall.

Several weeks ago, her son had been humiliated by a person.

That person was called Chen Changsheng.

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# Chapter 535 - The Letter Sent To The Myriad Willows Garden

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Su Li had left behind seven letters.

He had Xu Yourong pass on two of the letters to Chen Changsheng, one letter was left for his daughter, and another letter was left for that small child in that blacksmith in the village at the foot of Mount Li that was just beginning to learn the sword. He had also prepared a letter for Qiushan Jun, but Qiushan Jun had calmly rejected it.

The remaining two letters had been sent to two other locations via the most ordinary of postal routes.

One of these letters was sent to a mansion situated outside Hanqiu City.

The Myriad Willows Garden. Thirty thousand cold-resistant crooked willow trees were planted within this garden.

Zhu Luo was Sect Master of the Emotion-Severing Sect, the head of the Zhu clan, an old friend of Emperor Xian, and one of the Storms of the Eight Directions. Any one of these identities could let



him live a life impossible for an ordinary person to imagine. This garden that still flourished with greenery in the depths of winter was proof of this.

Today this mansion had a guest, an old and very fat man. As he sat on the round palace armchair, his fat waist was like the waters of a river spilling over a dike, making his bright yellow belt all the more conspicuous.

This fat elder had kind brows and pleasant eyes, his squinted eyes were filled with a calm and warmth detached from worldly affairs, and his face was one of jubilation. He looked just like those wealthy old men often found in the countryside, but since he could sit across from an important figure like Zhu Luo, it could be assumed that his status and background were not ordinary. Today, besides the myriad willows and mantle of snow, no one else could be seen in this garden. It might have had something to do with this portly elder's visit. Of course, it could also have had something to do with the letter placed on the table between them.

"When will that woman die..." The portly old man smiled and spoke, but when he said the word 'woman', he unexpectedly paused and his smile momentarily vanished. The word 'woman' was so faint that it was difficult to hear. The plump elder continued, "The stars above have their own plans. As for what time to go to the capital, we must still wait for additional news."

Zhu Luo slightly creased his brow, seeming somewhat dissatisfied with this sentence. "No matter how you look at it, our strength is still a bit lacking."

The old man sighed, "In order to conduct a grand project, mighty force is required. The White Emperor couple will definitely just watch from the sidelines. In fact, our best choice is still Su Li."

When mentioning Su Li's name, neither of them even glanced at the letter on the table.

After a moment of silence, Zhu Luo noted, "Su Li truly is very powerful."

Back in Xunyang City, Su Li was heavily injured and could not exchange blows with him, but he was forced to admit that purely in terms of strength, it was very difficult to find a person more powerful than Su Li.

The term 'strength' naturally was not strength as commonly understood by the common people, but the purest and most terrifying fighting strength.

"Black Robe planned for so many years and the demons sent out over a hundred thousand cavalry and wolfriders, ten-odd Demon Generals, and three of their figureheads to unite and suppress him on the snowy plains, but they still let him escape. On the following journey back south, as a cripple, he once more succeeded in developing his sword. Presumably, he comprehended some things and climbed to some unfathomably high peak. I'm afraid that he's advanced one more foot into the sea of stars. He truly is powerful to the extreme."

The portly elder sighed, "Back then, many people, me included,

believed that he had the greatest chance of killing that woman, but he obstinately refused. Now, if he were to help us, the probability of killing that woman would increase by thirty percent, but he just so happened to choose this time to leave."

Zhu Luo emotionlessly said, "Under the request of His Holiness, I went to Xunyang City to kill him. How could he join us? And why would he send me this letter?"

As the two spoke, they did not look at the letter on the table, but their minds had been focused on the letter the entire time. Now that they had finally mentioned it, their gazes fell upon it.

Nothing strange occurred in this quiet winter garden, yet in the chilly wind, one could faintly hear the clattering of spears and shields.

The portly elder narrowed his eyes at the letter. It was like a seam, bursting with fierce light, being cut open in a snow-white mantou. It was abnormally vigilant.

He then raised his head to Zhu Luo as if asking, should we open this letter or not?

Zhu Luo's expression was very solemn and for a long time, he did not speak.

The plump old man had noticed something peculiar about this letter, so given Zhu Luo's cultivation, he could naturally see it as

well.

He knew that this letter concealed a sword.

The letter was Su Li's letter, so the sword was naturally Su Li's sword.

Although Su Li's cultivation was extremely high and he was publicly acknowledged to have reached unfathomable heights in the path of the sword, when compared to the Eight Storms and four of the Saints, he was still a junior. Moreover, for various reasons, his name had never been mentioned alongside them.

He had written this letter to Zhu Luo precisely because he wanted to tell the entire continent that as long as he wished, he could destroy the so-called Storms of the Eight Directions at any time.

If this were several centuries ago when he was at his height, no, even several decades ago, even one year ago, when confronted by this letter, Zhu Luo would carelessly smile, then tear open the envelope, taking in at a glance all the sharpness on the paper. In this way, he would not cause any loss to the martial fame of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

But now, he was somewhat hesitant.

Because he had suffered severe injuries at Xunyang City and even now had not fully recovered.

Those injuries had come from Wang Po's blade, Liu Qing's sneak attack, and those ten thousand flowing lights in Chen Changsheng's sword sheath. His most serious injuries had come from the Holy Maiden's charge across a thousand li.

Even more importantly, just as Wang Po had said in Xunyang City, he was already old.

Su Li had also once mentioned it in his jeers that right now, he could die, but he could not lose in battle.

For the Emotion-Severing Sect and the Zhu clan, he was the tree that reached towards the heavens.

Other than the people of the Liang Household, all the people of Tianliang County required his protection.

What would happen if he lost?

The winter garden was exceptionally quiet. The thirty thousand cold-resistant and crooked willows in the distance waited with extreme patience in the cold for the coming of spring.

The portly old man was also very patient, calmly gazing at Zhu Luo.

After quite some time had passed, Zhu Luo finally made a decision, taking a deep breath.

The wind suddenly grew violent and the thousands of willows began to sway in the wind, seeming to cheer and also seeming to be wavering in fear.

No more hesitation could be seen on Zhu Luo's face, only indifference and cold arrogance.

He was a supreme human expert who had once charged into the snowy plains with only his sword. Even if he was troubled by old wounds, how could he be scared witless by a single letter?

His hand fell upon the letter, very firmly, and then tore it open.

A sword glow shot out from the envelope and its light made his face seem very pale.

This sword glow was so bright that the winter sun above the garden even dimmed and cause the willows to smoke. It was clearly daytime, but the garden seemed to have been cast into twilight.

A sword glow appeared in Zhu Luo's eyes. This sword glow did not come from the letter, but from his own world.

With a clang, the moonlight sword emerged from its sheath and slashed at the sword intent that had exploded from the letter.

With a cacophony of deafening clashes, a frenzied gale raged through the Myriad Willows Garden and the thirty thousand willows swayed back and forth.

A bright moon came from the north and suspended itself over the sky, attempting to drive away the dark night that had not fully set in.

The sword intent from the letter cared not for this. It instantly unleashed a massive light, touching all things, real and unreal, and setting them all ablaze!

The willows were instantly ignited, the icy ponds smashed, and countless flames soared to the sky like birds of fire.

The Golden Crow emerged from Mount Li!

The bright moon suddenly dimmed!

# Chapter 536 - The Setting Sun Amongst The Willows

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As Zhu Luo opened the letter from Su Li, the portly elder sat smiling on the side, not very concerned. He naturally knew that Su Li was quite powerful and his sword was quite terrifying, but this was still just a letter. Even if contained the concentrated soul of Su Li's sword intent, there was a limit to this medium. How could it truly injure Zhu Luo?

The old man even regarded Zhu Luo's hesitation with some contempt, thinking, perhaps the matter of the capital requires other arrangements.

But when the sword intent shot out of the envelope and all of the Myriad Willows Garden was plunged into darkness, the portly elder knew that he had been mistaken.

Su Li's sword was far more powerful and terrifying than he had imagined.

Solely relying on a sword intent on a sheet of paper, he was actually able to suppress a supreme expert of the Eight Storms?

Although Zhu Luo was still injured, this was still too inconceivable.

The level of this sword intent had even faintly surpassed Zhu Luo by a whole level!



Even the will of a Saint might not be able to accomplish this.

Besides those legendary experts of the past like Zhou Dufu, Chen Xuanba, Emperor Taizong, and Wang Zhice, who could do this?

Su Li was no Saint, but his path of the sword was already close to that of a god!

When he saw those Golden Crows surging through the garden and the sudden dimming of the bright moon in the night sky, the old man revealed a shocked expression. Without time to think, he flew over.

Zhu Luo was already in dire straits. If he did not act now, he would be too late.

With a howl, the plump elder's two palms tore through the air in front of him, swatting towards those Golden Crows formed of blazing sword intent.

He seemed like a mountain of meat, but he flew over very gently, his two palms descending with similar softness. They slowly fluttered, like real birds.

The Golden Crow Sword was a secret technique of Mount Li, created by Su Li. Its sword intent was incomparably hot, and once the sword rose up, it would bathe the world in endless light and heat, its energy unblockable.

Back in the Grand Examination and the Garden of Zhou, whenever Chen Changsheng used the Golden Crow Sword, even opponents stronger than him had to temporarily avoid its edge.

Today, these Golden Crow sword intents had come from Su Li's hand and their might was unimaginable.

Any other ordinary cultivator would probably be vaporized into smoke by these sword intents before they could even touch them.

Even experts of incredibly advanced cultivation could only do as Zhu Luo did, relying on the sword intent of the moonlight sword to confront it, but not directly touching it.

For some reason, although the old man had an expression of vigilance and fear, he still sent his palm flying towards those sword intents of Golden Crows.

An indescribable Qi appeared in the Myriad Willows Garden that had already been transformed into a ruined mansion.

This Qi was very powerful. It was still inferior to the moonlight sword intent, but this Qi exuded an ancient aura.

An almost real sun lay between the palms of the elderly man, incomparably bright and dazzling!

Under the illumination of its light, the portly old man's face no longer carried the slightest hint of jubilation, his kind brows and pleasant eyes all replaced by awe-inspiring dignity, and the images of dragons and tigers appeared behind him.

The present him no longer bore the slightest resemblance to those wealthy old men of the countryside. Now, he was clearly an emperor!

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Three powerful Qis collided in the Myriad Willows Garden.

With great difficulty, the moon in the sky spilled down its silver light.

The fierce sun incessantly supported the falling of the curtain of the night.

Countless sword intents like fiery birds shuttled back and forth between the sun and the sky.

The tens of thousands of cold-resistant willows began to burn.

This was not the blaze brought about by the twilight, but true flames.

The cold winter garden seemed to have been instantly plunged into the blazing abyss of the Netherworld.

With a massive boom, flames were sent flying in every direction. The scorched willows toppled, the wells shattered, the walls collapsed.

After a long time passed, those rampaging Qis finally calmed.

The mansion was in ruins, its cold pond no longer able reflect the images of others.

Zhu Luo leaned against a shattered willow by the pond, his face pale, his chest covered in specks of blood. Even more seriously, his left hand had been severed at the wrist.

The fat old man stood on a rotted table, his plump body almost causing the edges of the table to collapse and seem ready to shatter at any moment. No joy could be found on his portly face, nor any of the majesty of an emperor. Only exhaustion and ugliness was left behind.

He had reached the threshold of the Divine Domain many years ago. If not for his fear of the response from that person in the capital, perhaps he would have already crossed it. In the battle just now, he had even displayed strength to rival that of the Divine Domain.

But he and Zhu Luo had still lost, and had lost miserably. If that sword intent's true goal had not been Zhu Luo, if his clan's techniques and the Golden Crow Sword had not shared a similar source, he might also have suffered severe injuries. Moreover, even with his assistance, Zhu Luo might already be dead.

And their opponent had merely been a letter of Su Li's.

Zhu Luo slowly stood up and looked around him.

The limitless beauty of the Myriad Willows Garden was now a part of the past—only scorched earth remained. In the distance, some willow trees were still burning.

The Myriad Willows Garden still existed, but it no longer resembled its name.

Just like him.

He was keenly aware that this was Su Li's revenge.

To this, there was nothing he could say.

"Forgive me, but I cannot take part in this matter in the capital."

Zhu Luo said to the portly elder, not turning to face him, his expression somewhat desolate.

The portly elder knew that this was inevitable. Putting aside the possibility that Zhu Luo would forever be unable to return to the strength he held at his zenith, it was highly likely that he would have to leave the ranks of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

To Zhu Luo, the most important matter was to find a way to manage the futures of his clan and the Emotion-Severing Sect, because those two were his true legacy.

His mountainous body staggering, the plump old man made his way out of the Myriad Willows Garden.

Outside Hanqiu City, his subordinates assisted him in clambering with great difficulty onto an enormous carriage.

A middle-aged man, face caked with powder and voice rather piercing, whispered, "Prince, what happened?"

"Do you know? I originally thought that if this grand affair succeeded, the first thing I would do is steal that big imperial carriage of the Liang Household."

The portly elder narrowed his eyes in the direction of Xunyang City and sadly said, "But now I don't even know whether I'll have the chance to sit in it for the rest of my life."

He gazed at Xunyang City, but he was really gazing at the capital.

He spoke of the Liang Household's imperial carriage, but he

really spoke of that throne in the Imperial Palace.

That middle-aged man had already been deeply unsettled by the strange phenomena occurring in the Myriad Willows Garden, but upon hearing the prince's sighs, he became unsettled to the extreme.

He and these soldiers and officials were all subordinate officers of the prince's household, but they could only obey the orders of the capital. In the past few years, he and the other subordinates had taken incredible risks to assist the prince in spreading the word. If the prince's grand affair failed, what path did they have to survival?

"Wuqiong Bi has entered the capital."

The middle-aged man wanted to raise the prince's spirits, so he hurriedly relayed the news he had just received.

The portly elder was somewhat surprised. Although Wuqiong Bi was also one of the Eight Storms, she had never been a target of his recruitment efforts, because she was also a woman.

Why had that old Daoist nun gone to the capital? Might it introduce new variables?

# Chapter 537 - The Other Letter Sent To The Longevity Sect

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Su Li had sent one letter to Hanqiu City, thus transforming the Myriad Willows Garden into scorched earth and dispelling Zhu Luo's storm.

For the moment, this matter had not been spread to the rest of the continent.

At the moment, the continent was more concerned with discussing just what changes the departure of Su Li and the Holy Maiden would have on the world.

Of course, the happiest was the Longevity Sect.

The Longevity Sect was the root of all sects and stood side by side with Holy Maiden Peak, both treated alike as holy lands in the hearts of southerners. In addition, the Longevity Sect possessed extremely close ties with the Great Zhou Imperial clan and the Liang Household, and its connections with the aristocratic clans of the south were countless and nigh unbreakable, powerful to an almost unimaginable extent.

This was the case until ten-odd years ago, when a startling change occurred. The Longevity Sect imprisoned that Demon Princess in the cold pool, attempting to coerce Su Li into going north and assassinating the Tianhai Divine Empress. With only his sword, Su Li charged into the mountain, but upon realizing that his wife had been poisoned by the cold and was too weak to return,



he flew into a rage. After slaughtering to a man the ten-odd elders of the Longevity Sect, he bathed the sect in blood. After recovering from his heavy injuries, he went north to Xunyang City and killed every one of the people in the Liang Household that was involved in this matter. At least half of Su Li's exceptionally vicious reputation stemmed from this event.

From that moment on, no one dared to casually provoke Su Li. Simultaneously, the Longevity Sect no longer wielded the same prestige it once held. The various sects and monasteries all gradually began to turn their backs on the Longevity Sect. As for places like the Mount Li Sword Sect, they only maintained a surface level of respect, but in reality, they had already begun to act on their own.

To the Longevity Sect, Su Li was naturally the archcriminal of all this.

If they could kill Su Li, they would already have done it.

Although they could not do it, Su Li had fortunately chosen to leave on his own.

In the past few days, although the Longevity Sect was not hanging up bright lanterns, the mood there had become extremely good, the disciples walking with much more ease to their step. As for those few elders that were struggling on death's door, they began to preemptively celebrate and yearn for the beautiful life that was to come.

"The Mount Li Sword Sect is the sword of the Longevity Sect. It's only a matter of course that it be gripped in our hands."

During the internal strife of Mount Li, the Qiushan clan head had suddenly changed sides. [Elder Liang](#) of the Longevity Sect, who had been invited by him, had suffered severe injuries that he was even now still recovering from. Consequently, the cave in which he lived was the place where the elders of the Longevity Sect discussed official business. A thin and tall elder with an indifferent yet incomparably firm expression had said the above words.

(Elder Liang was previously called Elder Jiang)

Elder Liang recalled those myriad sword glows above Mount Li and slightly creased his brow. "To repeat our past glory is truly difficult."

After he spoke, the cave was silent. In those days, whatever the Longevity Sect ordered, the entire south, excluding Holy Maiden Peak, would follow. Which sect or monastery would dare disobey? But in these past years? Let alone the Mount Li Sword Sect, didn't even the Qiushan clan dare to scheme against the Longevity Sect?

"This sect's Qi and blood have been consumed, but how could Mount Li be any better? After that matter with Elder Xiao Songgong, the vitality of Mount Li is still greatly injured. Those fellows that are of the same generation as us or one generation younger, especially those people of the Sword Hall, suffered the backlash of the array. None of their injuries are light. In this short span of time, none of them should be able to come out and take care of matters."

"Don't forget, the current person administering Mount Li...is Qiushan."

"Qiushan...a youthful heroic genius, truly extraordinary, but in the end, he is still young, no?"

With an indifferent expression, the thin and tall elder spoke, "Not only Mount Li, there's also South Stream Temple. The current Holy Maiden is also very young...true, her prestige is enough, but she's only sixteen and not even at Star Condensation. As elders of the same sect, to help her manage some affairs is in accord with the laws of heaven and earth, out of concern for the younger generation."

As they listened, Elder Liang said nothing, but the other elder showed a joyous expression.

Elder Liang sighed, saying, "But did none of you think, what would we do if Su Li came back?"

After a moment of silence, the tall and thin elder sneered, "With Su Li's pride, since he's announced to the entire world that he's going far away, could he go anywhere else? Just like we speculated a few days ago, he and the Holy Maiden most likely prepared to go to the legendary other shore of the sea of stars, so how could they come back?"

Elder Liang looked at him and spoke earnestly, "But what if the legend is true? If he really does find the Sacred Light Continent, there still remains a day when he will come back."

A hint of fear flickered through the tall elder's eyes, but his words remained firm. "The rumors say that in the end, Zhou Dufu shattered the void and went. He also likely went over there, but not even he managed to find it...at least he did not come back. Su Li is strong, but could he be stronger than him?"

The other elder attempted to reason, "Senior Brother should not be too concerned. Su Li will probably not come back."

It was winter, but the Longevity Sect in the south was still warm. No snow fell amongst the mountains, only the incessant drizzle of rain, seeming like a joyous farewell.

Su Li had left and it was unknown when he would come back, or even whether he would come back at all. However, his letter had come.

As they gazed at the thin letter on the table, for a long time, nobody spoke, nobody moved.

The three elders by the table all had abnormally nasty expressions as if they were looking at some vile demon that had arisen from the deepest abyss.

The three remaining elders of the Longevity Sect had their courage shattered by this single letter.

The cave was deathly still. Nobody spoke, the only sound being

the dripping of water from the ivies deep in the cave.

As they listened to the dripping water, the tall and thin elder's face was abnormally ashen, an indicator of how thoroughly troubled he was.

Elder Liang's complexion was pale, his mouth opening and closing, but no words coming forth.

There was no name on the letter, or even any handwriting, but when their eyes fell upon it, they could sense that terrifyingly sharp sword intent, that stabbing pain.

This letter contained sword intent—Su Li's sword intent.

After quite some time that had passed, the deathly stillness in the cave was finally broken. The tall elder shouted, "Just what does he want to do? Rely on a single letter to scare us all to death?"

As he spoke, his chest heaved up and down like fire-roasted bamboo, ready to explode at any moment.

He truly was furious, so angry that his lungs were about to explode.

But his voice was somewhat cracked, because he was nervous.

He was forced to admit that even if Su Li was already far away

from them, a letter he left behind was sufficient to frighten the Longevity Sect.

This was, in fact, the real reason he was angry.

The other gazed at Elder Liang and asked worriedly, "Senior Brother, what do we do? Do we want to open it or not?"

A dry laugh suddenly echoed through the cave.

Elder Liang gazed at the letter, his pale face seeming to have gained back a little blood. As he looked at the green mountains, sea of clouds, and cold rain, strains of madness appeared in his eyes. He sternly yelled out at Su Li who had gone off to parts unknown, "Sending a letter just so you can wait for us to open it and fight with your sword intent...do you think us fools?"

That elder had asked whether or not they should open this letter. For him who had lived ten-odd years under Su Li's shadow, this wasn't even a question.

This letter definitely could not be opened.

Because he did not want to die.

"Have someone take this letter to the base of the mountain stream and then use the array to carefully suppress it!"

Elder Liang slightly narrowed his eyes and sneered, "I really wish to see how long Su Li's sword intent can last under the Great Golden Light Array."

The tall elder nodded at his words. Shortly after, he thought of one other important question. Wrinkling his brow, he asked, "But...it won't affect Chusu, right?"

Hearing the name 'Chusu', the other elder instantly grew nervous.

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# Chapter 538 - The Greatest Crisis Of The Orthodox Academy, She Has Come!

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"With the Golden Light Array safeguarding his Dao heart, no external factors can affect Chusu's cultivation."

Elder Liang continued, "On the contrary, I want to use the array to suppress Su Li's sword intent, and then, after grinding it to pieces with the myriad mountains, I will send it to Chusu to comprehend!"

Upon hearing this, the two others elders relaxed, thinking, if we really can smash Su Li's sword intent and send it off to Chusu, then perhaps Chusu can be presented to the world many years in advance of what the Sect Master calculated before his death. At that time, the Longevity Sect will truly begin to flourish once more!

Just as these three were caught up in these rapturous dreams of the future, a sudden change occurred.

The letter on the table began to fiercely judder.

With a rip, the letter tore apart and transformed into countless paper butterflies that scattered in every direction.

How could Su Li's letter require someone to open it to be seen? How could the sword intent he left behind be like some magical artifact, requiring some sort of stimulation?



He wanted the people of the Longevity Sect to see this letter, to see this sword, so regardless of whether or not someone opened it, he would definitely have the other side see it!

Tyrannical and swift, this sword intent soared upward and then slashed down!

The cave echoed with the shrill cries of a sword, so much so that those similarly shrill screams of misery were snuffed into silence.

The fierce and swift sword intent had severed all it had encountered.

The swords of those three elders of profound cultivation.

The cave of the Longevity Sect which had been unbroken for ten thousand years.

The pliant ivy in the depths of the cave.

The transparent water dripping off the ivy.

The invisible wind shaped by the flowing of the air.

In a flash, all this was sliced to shreds by the sword intent.

A mist of blood floated in the air. It was extremely grisly but also possessed a soul-stirring beauty.

Three swords had been sliced into ten-odd pieces.

Elder Liang's body had been covered with several dozen sword slashes and lay collapsed amongst the rubble. As he saw the sword intent rush out of the cave, his wan face revealed limitless surprise and remorse. Already on the verge of death, he gathered up the rest of his strength and sharply yelled, "Quickly shut the array!"

When those two other elders heard his cry and realized the problem, their eyes were filled with despair, yet they were powerless to stop the sword intent from flying into the sky. Their arms had been severed by that sword intent and they were covered in blood, powerless to stand.

The sword intent became a magnificent streak of light. It swiftly flew down from the mountain, crossed over the gate of the Longevity Sect and shot straight into a mountain stream enveloped in clouds and mist.

An enormous and terrifying sound boomed through the mountains. A dome of clear light covered the ten-odd mountain peaks within a radius of several hundred li.

This was the Sect-Protecting Array of the Longevity Sect.

Soon after, countless tooth-aching sounds of metal on metal rang

out from the mountain stream. Countless golden rays of light shot out and the sea of clouds roiled in unease.

Deep within the stream came a voice, immature yet full of hatred.

This voice was like that of a man, but also like that of a bird, or even some sort of repetition from a machine.

"Chusu! Chusu!"

The whistle of the sword suddenly grew sharper!

This voice gradually faded away, ceasing to be heard.

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It was already late at night, but many people were still not asleep.

For some, it was because they were in love with someone. For some, it was because they hated someone. For some, it was because they longed for someone. But there were some people that were longing for good food.

Before going to sleep, Xuanyuan Po had eaten a Tangjing roast

goose for a midnight snack, but after lying down on the bed, it didn't take long before he felt hungry. How could one sleep when hungry?

He walked down to the kitchen by the lake, intending to take the crab paste that he had pickled a few days ago and eat it.

Upon walking into the kitchen, he realized that the fire under the oven was extinguished. He didn't care, nor did he re-light it. In the darkness, he very accurately felt his way towards the location of the pickling jars.

In those seemingly unremarkable pickling jars was a rather extraordinary crab paste.

He had used the incomparably precious blue lobster in place of crab, so it should be called lobster paste.

He was presently the head of housekeeping for the Orthodox Academy, so he had an extremely good relationship with the chefs from Clear Lake Restaurant. He would naturally not be lacking in anything to eat, but he ate so extravagantly, even wastefully, that if Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six were to find out, there would definitely be a massive response.

So he had not let a single person find out about this pickled lobster paste and had secretly hidden it away.

The more secretively one ate the food, the more delicious it was.

Xuanyuan Po didn't understand many principles and rules of the human world, but he knew this one clearly. As his hand extended towards the pickling jars, he could almost taste the sublime salty-fresh flavor of the lobster paste, the rich sweetness contained within, and that exquisite texture that gradually coated his tongue...

But then, his hand hit nothing.

Those pickling jars that should have been there were not. All of them were gone, and the lobster paste within those pickling jars was also naturally no longer there.

Xuanyuan Po became abnormally angry, several extremely thin strands of electricity coursing through his pupils. His slightly curled and messy hair faintly began to crackle.

The world before his eyes moved from darkness to light, making the scene in the kitchen plain to see.

Not only the pickling jars, the pots, bowls, chopsticks, firewood, and even the kitchen counter had all been sliced into chunks and were piled on the floor.

The entire floor was a mess of debris and cooking broth, filthy beyond compare.

Xuanyuan Po grew even angrier but also warier. Just what had

happened, just who had displayed such frightening sword intent?

The entire room was filled with items that had been cut apart by sword intent. Only the Mountain Sea Sword was still there, quietly lying amidst the chunks of firewood.

Xuanyuan Po picked up the Mountain Sea Sword and followed the traces left behind to search for the sword intent. He realized that it was in the oven, faintly attached to some differently-colored ash.

This ash did not seem like that which resulted from the burning of wood, but more like that of paper.

He hesitated for a while, then used the Mountain Sea Sword to lightly prod at a ball of this ash.

This ball of ash instantly scattered.

An unimaginable cold suddenly enveloped the room.

Xuanyuan Po's body suddenly went stiff, his breathing grew coarse, and his heart was filled with an unfathomable sense of danger.

This cold and danger did not arise from the ball of ash that had just dispersed. Instead, it came from behind him, from behind the academy wall.

It was the deepest depths of the ocean, possessing a suffocating pressure and cold.

Endless blue-green waves had always been the ocean of death.

Xuanyuan Po began to sweat. Before the sweat could moisten his clothes, it was frozen into ice by that chill that symbolized death.

Gazing at the Orthodox Academy in the darkness, the old Daoist nun walked forward.

A line of ice appeared on the wall, which then noiselessly crumbled away into dust.

This scene seemed straight out of myths.

The academy wall collapsed and what appeared before her was the kitchen. Thus, the kitchen also noiselessly crumbled away.

Xuanyuan Po, holding the Mountain Sea Sword, stood amongst the ruins, his body continuously shaking.

Because he was very afraid.

Even though he was very brave, he was still very scared.

The person who had come was powerful beyond his imagination. The Qi was very cold, exuding the sense that it wished to extinguish all living things.

The small house on the other side of the winter lake.

Zhexiu opened his eyes.

Chen Changsheng opened his eyes.

They had both sensed this feeling and were taken by an indescribable fear.

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# Chapter 539 - The Old Bullying The Young

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The academy wall noiselessly collapsed and the old Daoist nun strode in through the breach.

With the fall of her footsteps, an incomparably powerful Qi, carrying the might of the ocean, instantly enveloped the entire Orthodox Academy.

The students in the dorms were still sleeping and the Orthodoxy cavalry in the side courtyard had also not sensed this.

In the house, Chen Changsheng and the rest had sensed it in the first moment, because what the old Daoist nun wished for was precisely to wake them up and for them to remember the events to follow.

They opened their eyes and felt that cold aura of silent extinction. It felt like they had fallen into a frigid icehouse and any drowsiness had vanished into nothingness.

One after the other, the windows of the house were pushed upon, revealing those young faces of theirs.

They looked at the old Daoist nun on the other side of the lake.

The instant they set eyes on the old Daoist nun, the aura of extinction transformed into an aura of death and endless fear.

This old Daoist nun was far too powerful, so powerful that they found it hard to even gather the will to resist.

When he saw the old Daoist nun, Tang Thirty-Six thought of one time when his grandfather got angry—all of Wenshui City shook three times. Zhexiu thought of the time when he was young, not long after he was driven from his tribe, that he had once seen from a distance an enormous Mountain-toppling Fiend as well as that short yet absolutely terrifying figure sitting on its crown.

Su Moyu's face became abnormally pale because he knew who this old Daoist nun was.

At this time, Chen Changsheng very naturally thought of that storm in Xunyang City. He then realized in shock that this Daoist nun was actually an expert of that level.

Logically, with Chen Changsheng's current status, no one would dare move against him in the capital. But now, he did not have this self-confidence because this old Daoist nun was no ordinary person. Even the Pope would have to give this person a little face. Moreover, she was currently giving off an extreme feeling of obliterating extinction.

The extinction of '[one thousand mountains, but extinct are the birds flying over them](#)'. The obliteration of '[ten thousand roads, but all traces of men obliterated](#)'.

(Both portions in quotes are from the poem "River Snow" by Liu Zongyuan, a Tang Dynasty poet.)

She viewed all living beings of the world as pigs and dogs. Just who wouldn't she dare to kill?

At this time, Su Moyu's voice rang out. He asked the old Daoist nun in shock, "Auntie, what are you planning to do?"

Upon hearing this, Chen Changsheng and the rest finally confirmed their conjectures and knew the identity of the person that had come.

Tang Thirty-Six's expression did not change, but his fingers on the windowsill somewhat paled.

Zhexiu's expression did not change, but the fingers of his right hand had already slowly begun to release his walking stick and move to grip the hilt of his sword.

She had finally come. This peerless expert who pampered her son, covered for the faults of others, who was irritable, prone to kill, and was famed for her mood swings, had finally come.

Wuqiong Bi, the sole woman of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

Her husband was called Bie Yanghong, also on the Storms of the Eight Directions.

They had only one son called Bie Tianxin.

One could imagine just how the sole son of two of the Eight Storms had been raised.

Bie Tianxin had lived his entire life drifting along with the wind and current, all the way until several months ago, when he encountered Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six in front of the Orthodox Academy.

At the time, Su Moyu had warned them that the Orthodox Academy might encounter this sort of trouble.

Chen Changsheng disagreed, thinking that the Orthodox Academy had not done anything excessive to Bie Tianxin. With Wuqiong Bi's status and position, there was no need for her to make things difficult for them.

Only now, upon seeing that old Daoist nun across the lake, did he finally understand that not all people up high were people up high that had transcended the world, that not all of them had a frame of mind that had broken away from the secular world.

"Senior...entering the Orthodox Academy in the middle of the night, I ask what teachings you wish to impart."

He gazed at the Daoist nun, his voice firm as he asked.

He was the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, the Pope's appointed successor. Solely in terms of status, he was not at all

beneath this old Daoist nun, so when he spoke, he spoke with great composure.

With an apathetic expression, the old Daoist nun questioned, "You are Chen Changsheng?"

Ever since he had come to the capital from Xining, Chen Changsheng had heard this sort of question countless times.

At times, it had been very annoying, like the time he encountered that Monolith Guardian in the Mausoleum of Books. At other times, it had been an honor, like that time he met Zhu Luo outside of Hanqiu City.

The old Daoist nun that was asking this question was of equal status to Zhu Luo, but he knew that this was certainly no honor, but a danger.

With an indifferent expression, life and death already decided, the old Daoist nun declared, "In a moment, I will kill this person."

As she spoke, she stared at Chen Changsheng and pointed at Xuanyuan Po's back.

Xuanyuan Po's body faintly trembled, but under this incomparably terrifying pressure, he found it simply impossible to turn around or escape.

"I will also do a few more things for all of you to see."

All this time, the old Daoist nun did not even glance at Xuanyuan Po and the ruins of the kitchen.

In her eyes, Xuanyuan Po was already a dead man.

Tonight, she had already arranged many plans for these young men of the Orthodox Academy, had decided their lives.

Zhexiu was greatly admired by the Divine Generals of the Great Zhou Army, so this wolf cub would only suffer heavy injury. Cutting off an arm or a leg would suffice.

She would not kill Chen Changsheng or Tang Thirty-Six, because even someone as powerful as her did not wish to offend the Orthodoxy or the Wenshui Tangs.

But this did not mean that she was letting them go.

Before their eyes, she would beat Zhexiu into a cripple and then slowly kill this demi-human youth.

She wanted them to watch as the blood of their friends stained the scene while they were powerless to act.

She wanted them to understand what was meant by true helplessness, by true despair.

She believed that in the aftermath, their lives might be more filled with suffering than if they had died.

This was very good. She had originally come to instruct them, so she would engrave deeply into their minds an unforgettable memory.

As for whether or not these youths of the Orthodox Academy would resist...she had never even considered this question. It was said that these youths were all true geniuses, but so what? Disregarding the Proclamation of Azure Sky or the Proclamation of Golden Distinction, if they were juniors like Wang Po or Xiao Zhang, she might have to pay them a glance or two, but what did these youths amount to?

Yes, if these were some other youths, after feeling such powerful and frightening Qi, and especially after knowing of this old Daoist nun's identity, they would probably give upon any sort of resistance because they were simply no match for her. If they were eagle chicks, the old Daoist nun was the frigid and high altitudes of the sky. If they were young tiger cubs, the old Daoist nun was the unseeable bottom of a deep valley.

However, they were not other youths, they were the youths of the Orthodox Academy.

In Xunyang City, Chen Changsheng dared to wield his sword against Zhu Luo. On the snowy plains, Zhexiu dared to flash his fierce teeth against the demons. When he was three, Tang Tang dared to urinate on the Tang Old Master's face. Just after entering the capital, Xuanyuan Po dared to strike Tianhai Ya'er.

In any case, if they had no means of winning no matter what, then they shouldn't fight? This was not their logic. In their view, since they couldn't win no matter what they did, it was only natural that they fight first. If they couldn't win? So what if they couldn't win? If they were looking for death, then they would look for life in the middle of death.

Youths began to prepare for battle, each with their own methods of battle.

The walking stick lay in the shadow of the ground, Zhexiu stood in the shadow of the window. His face was completely veiled in shadow that obscured his blood-red eyes, his firm wolf fur, and his sharp claws. He quietly stared at the old Daoist nun, his right hand gripping the half-broken Demon Commander Sword, so calm and indifferent as to engender fear in others.

Tang Thirty-Six exerted a little force in his palms, causing the windowsill to instantly crumble. With several strange sounds, several fireworks shot off into the night of drifting snow. As it turned out, he had installed several mechanisms in the Orthodox Academy. This was his way of fighting. When encountering such a terrifying enemy, the first thing he did was to naturally send out warning fireworks. The place closest to here was the Imperial Palace, and Xue Xingchuan would most likely hurry over as quickly as possible. As for those experts the Wenshui Tangs had sent over to guard him in secret, they should appear even sooner. Of course, even when the second-ranked Divine General and the Guardians of the Wenshui Tang clan worked together, they still would not be a match for this old Daoist nun, but he did not believe that this old Daoist nun would dare commit murder under the gaze of



thousands.

With a pale face, Su Moyu looked at the Daoist nun and asked in a shaky voice, "Auntie, do you really want to have two families fall out and become enemies?"

Chen Changsheng stared at the old Daoist nun, not preparing to use the ten thousand swords in his sheath or the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, but instead holding a letter. He knew that no matter how desperately they fought, they were not even worthy of a single finger of this Daoist nun. He could only hope that Su Li's letter could display its use.

With several extremely faint sounds of extinguishing, before those warning fireworks were able to release their light, they vanished without a trace.

Tang Thirty-Six's face carried an unsightly expression. This was his first time encountering this level of expert. Now, he understood that all these plans and stratagems regarding fighting and the human mind were absolutely meaningless in the face of such opponents. These people had already transcended the secular world, so how could they be entrapped by its wisdom?

Chen Changsheng's tightened his grip on the letter, his mood rather grave.

Suddenly, the seemingly forgotten Xuanyuan Po, already marked as dead by the old Daoist nun, began to move.

In the ruins of the kitchen, he turned around slowly and with great difficulty, and then he slowly raised the sword in his hands.

He was closest to the academy wall, closest to the Daoist nun, could sense best the Qi of obliterating extinction, and bore the greatest pressure.

When Chen Changsheng, Zhexiu, and the rest were preparing to fight, he was still resisting this pressure.

Ultimately, he had finally managed to turn around and raise his sword.

In order to confront the terrifying expert that was the old Daoist nun, in order to overcome the innate fear of death, Xuanyuan Po had used all of his courage.

A simple action like this had completely consumed all his strength and spirit.

As he directly confronted the old Daoist nun, his whole body incessantly shook like he was just beginning to recover from some serious illness. The sword in his hands was the same, tottering around like it was about to collapse.

He had already displayed enough courage, but how could the present him fight, how could he wield his sword?

For the first time, the old Daoist nun looked directly at Xuanyuan

Po.

Her eyes revealed endless, boundless scorn and contempt.

Logically, exceptional experts on the level of the Storms of the Eight Directions would not humiliate young members of the junior generation.

But today, she had come for the explicit purpose of humiliating the Orthodox Academy.

Xuanyuan Po was a bear youth. He placed the greatest importance on chivalry and honor and was the most unable to endure humiliation.

In his blushing face, between his somewhat immature features, a hint of determination appeared. With a roar, his two hands tightened their grip on the sword and slashed at the old Daoist nun!

The sound of whistling winds erupted from the house as Zhexiu, like a gray shadow, instantly leaped across the icy surface of the lake and arrived on the other side.

Chen Changsheng's figure vanished as he used the Yeshi Step. Carrying bits of snow from the forest, he rushed to Xuanyuan Po's back. His two hands tightened as he prepared to rip open the letter.

Su Moyu revealed an expression of resolve and stuck his hand into his bosom.

Tang Thirty-Six was the last to act, but his voice was the first to arrive.

"Wuqiong Bi, \*\*\*\* your \*\*\*\*!"

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# Chapter 540 - With The Snap Of A Finger, The Powerful Enemy Is Wiped Out By A Flying Sword Of Ash

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In normal times, no matter how proud and arrogant Tang Thirty-Six was, he would not utter such obscene words towards this old Daoist nun, because this old Daoist nun's status was truly too high. Even the Tang Old Master might not treat her with any respect, but he would at least feel some fear. However, Tang Thirty-Six had still chosen without hesitation to curse at her because he wished to deliberately enrage the old Daoist nun and divide her attention; because he was currently very angry and afraid, but so angry that he had forgotten his fear; and because Xuanyuan Po had exceeded everyone's expectations and raised up the sword in his hand.

This bear youth who was so bursting with energy that he needed six meals a day, who hit trees nonstop every single day, had his own way of fighting. He was the bravest of the entire Orthodox Academy and his way of fighting was different from Chen Changsheng and the rest: he did not think. After being humiliated, he wished to fight to expunge this stain, even if he had to pay his life for it.

But how could his sword strike the old Daoist nun? How could he obtain victory over her? Based on the standards of human cultivation, Xuanyuan Po was already at Ethereal Opening, but it was simply impossible for him to wound the old Daoist nun. The heavy metal sword was like a weak and pliable willow branch, held aloft in the cold wind coming off the lake, incapable of descending.

The old Daoist nun gazed at the sword, seemingly recognizing its origins, causing her to arch her brows in surprise. However, she had no intentions of showing mercy. That cold aura of silent extinction instantly seized control of Xuanyuan Po's body and sea of consciousness. In the next moment, like a frenzied wave, she would tear him into a fine dust. As long as she willed it, Xuanyuan Po would die.

Chen Changsheng, Zhexiu, Su Moyu, and Tang Thirty-Six were like four arrows, shooting over to that side of the winter lake, but even if they staked their lives on it, they seemed incapable of changing the situation. They seemed capable only of watching with eyes wide open as Xuanyuan Po died in front of them. Was there anyone that could change all of this?

Perhaps there was.

Chen Changsheng still had one final method. Without any hesitation, he prepared to throw out that life-saving item.

Su Moyu was also prepared, Tang Thirty-Six was also prepared.

They were all prepared to take out those precious treasures they had kept as final reserves in the hopes that they could seize a possibility of survival for Xuanyuan Po.

It was at this moment that something occurred beyond everyone's imagination.

The sword in Xuanyuan Po's hands had been bound up in the cold wind and was incapable of pressing forward even one inch. In the end, however, it still carried a little wind with it, even if it was the gentlest breeze in the world.

This gentle breeze was powerless to shatter the stillness of the cold lakeshore, powerless to stir a single strand of the horsetail whisk at the Daoist nun's waist. It couldn't even brush the snow, but it could brush dust.

Xuanyuan Po stood amongst ruins, his feet standing where the oven once was. Ash from the oven was spilled all around him.

Some of the ash was the leftover cinders from the burning of firewood while some of the ash was from the burning of a piece of paper.

Previously, Xuanyuan Po had used his sword to prod at some of this paper ash. Now, along with the breeze stirred up by the sword, this ash softly and gently floated up.

The lakeshore at night was pitch-black, but the ash faintly revealed a red color. As it turned out, sparks had been concealed within this ash.

The breeze wafted up the ash, and the sparks glimmered and danced, forming a sword in the air.

This sword formed of sparks slashed down at the same angle as

Xuanyuan Po's sword, whooshing as it cut forward.

Snap! By the lakeshore, the air of the Orthodox Academy seemed to be cut apart by this sword.

The old Daoist nun's pupils suddenly constricted and she felt an acute sense of danger.

After stepping into the Divine Domain, she very rarely encountered this sort of feeling because there were very few people in the continent that could threaten her.

What was going on here? Where did that phantasmal sword formed from sparks come from? Why did she feel danger?

Countless thoughts cycled through the old Daoist nun's sea of consciousness at unimaginable speeds like streaks of light as she constantly calculated.

But this sword of sparks moved so quickly that before she obtained the result of her calculations, it had already arrived!

The old Daoist nun had no time to think. With a whistle, the horsetail whisk that had been suspended at her side rose up without any wind and fell in her hands, and then was sent swatting towards that sword of sparks!

This horsetail whisk was like one thousand willow branches and ten thousand catkins, each one soft and pliant, surging forth like a



tide!

This was an ocean of boundless blue-green, yet utterly lacking in vitality, only containing an aura of silent extinction!

She had no idea of who had caused the sudden appearance of this sword of sparks, but she felt an acute sense of danger, so she used her own Divine Dao Technique!

The horsetail whisk carried along countless tides imbued with the aura of silent extinction and swatted towards the sword of sparks.

Compared to that frenzied tide that spanned across the world, the phantasmal sword formed from gentle sparks seemed all the more tiny, all the more fragile. How could it block this tide? The sword of sparks was in front of Xuanyuan Po, so if it was annihilated, Xuanyuan Po's body and soul would inevitably be engulfed as well.

Yet when this tiny and fragile sword of sparks clashed with the ten thousand surging tides stirred up by the horsetail whisk, not only was it not extinguished, it instantly began to violently blaze! The Orthodox Academy was instantly bathed in absolute red. The trees, near and far, all seemed to be set ablaze!

The sword, borrowing the strength of the fire, began to flaunt itself, transforming into a sword of fire around seven feet long that exuded an incredibly powerful Qi towards the night sky.

Violent tides like mountains? Cut it down! Silent extinction like the ocean? Cut it down!

Cut apart all things!

With a boom, the sword of fire cut through the ten thousand surging tides. Bringing with it innumerable strands of horsetail whisk, it slashed at the old Daoist nun!

A shocked expression suddenly appeared on the old Daoist nun's face. With a shriek of terror, she fiercely retreated.

The section of academy wall that had noiselessly collapsed now completely exploded in the face of her violent retreat.

The night sky resounded with the sounds of tearing space. The enormous blazing sword continued to cut towards the Daoist nun as she fell back.

Those innumerable strands of the horsetail whisk that had been severed all danced in the darkness.

The restaurants and houses beyond the Orthodox Academy's wall collapsed with a boom. The old Daoist nun retreated several hundred zhang and only when she reached the banks of the Luo River was she finally able to stand firm.

The towering tides brought about by her horsetail whisk had all been beaten down. Countless great waves broke out over the Luo

River, white waves heaving up and down!

The old Daoist nun stared at that sword of fire which had pursued and cut down at her, her face filled with incredulity. She shrilly yelled, "Burning Heaven Third Move!"

Only now did she finally recognize the origins of this sword!

The fragile and tiny phantasmal sword of sparks formed from the ashes in the kitchen had ignited when confronting the wind and exploded with an unimaginable might.

Her horsetail whisk, her aura of silent extinction, her endless blue-green sea, had filled up the world, yet it was no match for this sword. But why?

Because a single spark of fire could burn a plain to ash and it could also burn the heavens!

Naturally, this sword was precisely Su Li's Third Move of Burning Heaven!

As she uttered this cry, the Burning Heaven Sword reached the banks of the Luo River.

The dark Luo River no longer possessed its usual calm. The snowflakes falling from the sky were instantly vaporized into countless puffs of steam by this sword intent.

In the heavy mist came once more a world-shaking boom as well as the mournful and astonished cry of the old Daoist nun.

The mist suddenly dispersed, the dust fell, and three li of the dikes lining the Luo River had already collapsed.

Holding the horsetail whisk, the old Daoist nun stood in the shallow water under the dike. Her right sleeve had been completely shredded away, revealed her skin that was as white as jade. Her black hair was in complete disorder and her body was covered in gravel. The horsetail whisk consisted only of the handle and a few strands, leaving it in an exceptionally sorry state, just like her.

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# Chapter 541 - The True Objective Of The Burning Heaven Sword

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"This is impossible!" the old Daoist nun shrilly cried.

When she sensed that even her own Dao heart seemed to have been cracked by the Burning Heaven Sword, she was so shocked and angered that she almost went mad.

Why would the Orthodox Academy have Su Li's sword intent? Could Su Li have guessed that she would come? Once she had confirmed that this powerful sword intent was the Burning Heaven Sword, she was constantly and worriedly considering this question. But what shocked her, angered her, and even left her somewhat perplexed was just why this sword intent was so powerful. It was publicly acknowledged that Su Li was the supreme expert of the path of the sword, but how was she unable to even receive a single attack? Moreover, this was merely a sword intent that Su Li had left in the Orthodox Academy, not even his real sword!

She was no ordinary expert, she was one of the Storms of the Eight Directions who had stepped into the Divine Domain many years ago. She used to believe that although Su Li had also stepped into the Divine Domain, he had done it many years after she had—that no matter how prodigious his talent, he was still no match for her in terms of cultivation. But now it turned out...she could not even confront a single strand of sword intent from Su Li!

After being stricken with anger, the old Daoist nun became stricken with panic. As she stared at the terrifying sword of fire, a

desire to retreat naturally took root in her Dao heart.

In the past, she would definitely have continued to battle, but now that she had confirmed that she was no match for Su Li, why wouldn't she retreat? She had infiltrated the capital without telling her husband, so there would be no one coming to her rescue. More importantly, Su Li was not the Pope nor was he the Tianhai Divine Empress. He was a cold-blooded, emotionless madman, a person who would really dare to kill the Eight Storms!

The Luo River was once more disturbed by countless waves. In the snowy night, they were like piles made of countless bits of paper. Just as the sword intent slashed down once more, the Luo River resounded with the old Daoist nun's howl of reluctance. Her figure instantly vanished and appeared on the other bank, then quickly vanished into the boulevards and alleys of the capital.

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Chen Changsheng and the rest used their fastest speed to follow the trail of restaurants and houses collapsed by the old Daoist nun's retreat. When they reached the banks of the Luo River, however, no one was there, only snow dancing in the night sky, those threads cut down from the horsetail whisk, and that sword of fire suspended over the Luo River.

Those threads were not willow catkins nor were they snowflakes. Even the thinnest of these threads contained a monstrous power

that could easily slay them. If that horsetail whisk were to strike with full force, it might really be able to shake the entirety of the Luo River...truly worthy of being a peerless expert who had stepped into the Divine Domain!

Upon sensing the power contained in those threads, Chen Changsheng and the rest all subconsciously turned to Xuanyuan Po who was the first to dare attack the old Daoist nun, their gazes filled with admiration. At the same time, they thought, then how powerful is the sword of fire that cut this horsetail whisk into a defeathered chicken and forced the old Daoist nun into retreat?

"What's going on here?" Tang Thirty-Six asked at that blazing sword hanging in the night.

Earlier on in the night, Chen Changsheng had comprehended the sword intent in the letter, so he had a rough idea what was going on. "This is Senior Su Li's sword."

Tang Thirty-Six's lingering fear still had not dissipated. He thought, if not for this sword, the Orthodox Academy might have run with blood tonight. Even if that old Daoist nun had not made things too difficult for Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six and Su Moyu for the sake of the Orthodoxy and the Wenshui Tangs, Zhexiu would definitely suffer all sorts of humiliation while Xuanyuan Po would be completely out of luck.

This battle of experts that had been fought from the Orthodox Academy all the way to the banks of the Luo River had alarmed many people.

Not long after they reached the Luo River, a flame plunged down from the night. Xue Xingchuan on his Red Cloud Qilin had hurried over as quickly as possible.

Simultaneously, the three Guardians dispatched to the capital by the Wenshui Tang clan also finally appeared in the darkness and surrounded Tang Thirty-Six.

This was the first time Chen Changsheng and the others were able to get a look at the true strength of the Wenshui Tangs, so they couldn't but curiously glance over.

The streets rumbled with a storm of hooves, most likely the Orthodoxy cavalry and Imperial Guards rushing over.

Xue Xingchuan examined the collapsed Luo River dike and the line of houses and restaurants that had been transformed into ruins. With a grim expression, he asked, "What happened here?"

"Wuqiong Bi came," Tang Thirty-Six replied.

One of the Eight Storms actually sneaked into the capital? Xue Xingchuan's expression flickered, then his gaze turned to that massive sword of fire blazing above the Luo River and his expression changed once more. With his level of cultivation, he could naturally tell that this was not a real sword, but a phantasmal one. However, what made him wary was that even at his level of cultivation, he was still far from being a match for this sword. Thus, without even needing to ask, he knew who this



sword intent belonged to.

"Su Li...why did he hide this sword intent in the Orthodox Academy?"

He looked into Chen Changsheng's eyes and asked, "Don't tell me he knew in advance that Wuqiong Bi would mean you harm?"

This was the matter the old Daoist nun least understood before she left and it was also a matter that Chen Changsheng had not yet understood.

He had originally thought that of the two letters that Senior Su Li had requested Xu Yourong give to him, the letter that he was requested to burn promptly after reading was meant to assist in comprehending sword intent while the letter in his bosom was a life-saving treasure. Now it seemed that Su Li having him burn the first letter had some other, deeper meaning.

Only by borrowing natural flame to ignite its sword soul could the sword intent of the Burning Heaven Sword truly display its mightiest power, but how had Su Li confirmed what time this sword intent would appear? Had it been aroused by the completely unreasonable courage Xuanyuan Po had displayed or was it because Su Li had calculated in advance that Wuqiong Bi would come?

The Orthodoxy cavalry and Imperial Guards had hurried onto the scene, as had the Li Palace priests and the official labor corps of the capital's government. They began to clean up the scene and assist the wounded, to carry over sands and stone to stabilize the

collapsed dike. The scene began to grow livelier and the Burning Heaven Sword in the night sky began to lose its light, growing very difficult to see.

Xue Xingchuan still kept his eyes fixed on that location.

Chen Changsheng and the others also continued to stare at that place.

This matter seemed ready to come to a close; all had returned to tranquility. But was this really the case?

For some reason, none of them thought so. They all felt that something else was going to happen.

Just as expected, in the next moment, in the most unreasonable fashion, the night sky above the Luo River began to burn.

It was like countless Golden Crows had flown out of the sun and descended upon the human world. The world was bathed in a pure, white light and the capital seemed to be transported from night to day.

Those workers and soldiers laboring on the dike raised their hands in stupefaction, wondering just what was going on.

The Burning Heaven Sword began to burn and expand. In a few breaths of time, it encompassed the entire sky. From the ground, it was as long as at least half a street!

The laborers and soldiers and those denizens of the capital that had been startled awake all stared up at the enormous sword burning in the night sky, crying out with countless gasps of shock.

The Burning Heaven Sword fiercely burned.

No snow could fall from the clouds, nor any rain, and there wasn't even any mist.

The clouds in the night sky were burned clean away by this fire, gradually revealing the sky studded with stars.

Xue Xingchuan's face instantly grew pale beyond compare and he immediately roared out a shout of warning in the direction of the Imperial Palace. Simultaneously, he leaped onto the back of the Red Cloud Qilin and flew off into the night!

Chen Changsheng had also guessed and his eyes were filled with astonishment. He thought, no way, Senior. You've already left; why do you still have to act crazy?

The old Daoist nun did not understand why Su Li had left this strand of sword intent in the Orthodox Academy. Xue Xingchuan did not understand, and neither did Chen Changsheng. This was because no matter how high Su Li had cultivated on the path of the sword, even if he could use his sword to divine the will of the heavens, it was still utterly impossible to anticipate the movements of an expert of the Divine Domain and thus lay an ambush for them.

This strand of sword intent that Su Li had left in the Orthodox Academy had never been prepared for the old Daoist nun.

He had left the world seven letters, and the sword intent he had concealed in this letter he asked Chen Changsheng to burn after reading was the strongest.

The old Daoist nun's arrival at the Orthodox Academy and Xuanyuan Po's sword had roused the sword intent within the ash. Consequently, the sword intent had repelled the Daoist nun in passing.

Yes, in passing, on the way, conveniently, because it could do it without any extra trouble.

Even if the old Daoist nun was one of the Eight Storms, she was not worthy of Su Li especially preparing a strand of sword intent for her.

He held her in complete disregard and disdain.

The person he wished to fight, the objective of this most powerful sword intent, had always been that person.

That person was in the Imperial Palace, had always been in the Imperial Palace.

That person was no ordinary person, but a Saint.

With a whistle resounding through the night sky, Xue Xingchuan rode the Red Cloud Qilin into the air. A streak of fire, he stabbed at the massive Burning Heaven Sword with his spear!

Yet before his spear could even touch the Burning Heaven Sword, it was halted. A violent gale suddenly snapped the streak of fire and it plummeted to the ground.

Xue Xingchuan and the Red Cloud Qilin fell into the river and he spit out a mouthful of blood.

The massive sword of fire finally moved. Carrying along countless flames and heat, it shot through the sky from the Luo River towards the Imperial Palace!

As they watched this magnificent and spectacular sight, all the people on the ground were so shocked that they could not speak.

Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six and the others' eyes were filled with reverence and admiration. Only by cultivating to this sort of level could one be content and without grudges, right?

Zhexiu's face was emotionless, but his eyes were filled with enthusiasm and resolve. He thought, even if you're stronger, in the future, there will be a day where I defeat you!

Ever since the beginning of winter, snow had fallen on and off

over the capital, but the clouds above rarely scattered, until tonight. The strand of sword intent formed into the massive Burning Heaven Sword emitted boundless light and heat into the world, and the snow clouds were instantly burned away, revealing the stars in the sky.

As the Burning Heaven Sword shot towards the Imperial Palace, the snow clouds scattered before it, revealing star after star. It was a very beautiful scene, seeming just like a brush painting the sky, countless stars lighting up as the sword surged forward.

Star after star lit up in the night sky. The starlight did not fall upon the human world, but on the trajectory of the Burning Heaven Sword as it transformed into countless scales of light.

The Burning Heaven Sword had finally transformed into a dragon!

At this point, the entire capital was finally awakened.

There was someone that had never fallen asleep.

When that old Daoist nun passed that alley, the Tianhai Divine Empress awoke.

Then she ascended the steps and stood upon the Dew Platform.

Besides the Mausoleum of Books, this was the highest point in the capital. From there, one could observe the closest stars and the

vastness of the human world.

She watched as the old Daoist nun stood outside the Orthodox Academy, her expression indifferent.

She watched as a powerful sword intent appeared in the Orthodox Academy. Her expression was still indifferent, but she raised her brows, apparently rather interested.

Now, this sword was flying from the banks of the Luo River to the Imperial Palace.

She stood on the Dew Platform, the gale gusting against her perfect face but unable to disperse her indifferent expression, merely causing her fine black hair to drift about.

She held her hands behind her back, gazing at the ever-nearer sword dragon in the night sky. Her expression was calm, a sense of graveness finally appearing in her eyes.

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# Chapter 542 - An Ebony Hairpin

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She took one step forward, bringing her to the very edge of the Dew Platform.

Night Pearls and the human world lay at her feet, the stars and fate above her head.

She slowly opened her hands, her broad sleeves hanging down and dancing in the wind.

She was like one standing before an abyss, cautious and small.

She was like one standing before the ocean, the scene majestic.

An extremely subtle and powerful Qi appeared on the Dew Platform.

With a shake of her wide sleeves, the night wind suddenly shifted directions and began flowing in reverse, heading towards the Burning Heaven Sword.

Strands of black hair brushed against her cheeks and drifted forward. It was somewhat disorderly, but this only added to her beauty.

With a shake of her hair, the ebony hairpin stuck within fell off, but it did not fall down. Instead, it flew into the night sky.



The entire world knew that the Divine Empress possessed an ebony hairpin. Regardless of the occasion, it would be thrust into her hair.

It wasn't because the hairpin was very beautiful, or because the Phoenix head carved onto it was so vivid and lifelike, but because it was no ordinary hairpin.

This was third-ranked on the Tier of Legendary Weapons, Wooden Sword Little Phoenix!

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An extremely clear and beautiful Phoenix cry, incomparably grave and solemn, resounded through the capital.

The ebony hairpin shot straight up from the Dew Platform into the night, transforming under the starlight into a graceful and beautiful, yet incredibly furious Black Phoenix!

This Black Phoenix was so massive that it seemed to obscure the stars. Extending a single claw, it straight away grabbed the blazing Burning Heaven Sword!

A terrifying noise reverberated ceaselessly through the world.

The Black Phoenix's right claw had snatched the fire dragon that was the Burning Heaven Sword!

The dragon scale-like starlight surrounding the Burning Heaven Sword instantly dimmed, then, with countless cracking sounds, shattered one by one!

But the Burning Heaven Sword seemed to have long anticipated this and directly pierced through those scales of starlight! !

Su Li's sword...had truly left its sheath!

An incredibly sharp sword intent covered the entire night sky. The scattered and shattered starlight was cut into even finer fragments and descended like snowflakes!

Several black feathers drifted up!

Another Phoenix cry rang out, even more tyrannical than before!

The Black Phoenix unfurled its several-dozen-li wings!

The Burning Heaven Sword thrust into its black feathers and its sharp beak fiercely collided against the tip of the Burning Heaven Sword!

A stream of light appeared—countless streams of light appeared!

They contained flowing light and overflowing color, a magnificence nigh impossible to describe!

The night was illuminated and the world seemed once more to have returned to daytime. From the Imperial Palace to the Heavenly Dao Academy, from the Imperial Court to the Li Palace, the protective arrays of countless buildings were triggered and activated by the Qi spilling from the sky. Countless spheres of clear light almost simultaneously appeared on the streets and alleys of the capital.

This scene was truly far too beautiful, so beautiful that it was awe-inspiring, impossible to look at directly. In truth, few people could see this scene.

The stone pillars around the Li Palace emitted an ancient Qi. In the palace hall in the deepest part of the Li Palace, the Pope quietly stared upward at the night sky cut out by the sky well. As he gazed at the enormous blazing sword and that Black Phoenix he had not seen for many years, he exhaled a long sigh filled with some nigh-incomprehensible meaning.

The trees of the Mausoleum of Books exuded their own Qi, even more ancient than that emitted by the stone pillars. The elderly Divine General under the pavilion at the lower end of the Divine Path slowly raised his head, the dust of history on his armor slowly being shed. Even he of the tranquil heart and lonely Dao had his heart and soul shaken by tonight's battle.

After quite some time had passed, the streams of light in the night sky gradually faded away.

The thundering collisions of Qi high up in the sky gradually vanished and the snow clouds all around gradually congregated, once more obscuring the shattered starlight.

The capital once more entered the dark night and the world returned to peace.

People stood by the windows of their houses, stood in ruins, stood by the Luo River, rubbing their aching eyes and gazing once more into the night.

There was nothing in the night: no enormous blazing sword, no Black Phoenix. All phenomena had vanished, almost as if nothing had happened.

Those magnificent and glorious scenes seemed to be imagined.

Snow began to fall once more, dancing in the cold wind.

Chen Changsheng extended a palm and took one of the snowflakes, but realized that its color was not white, but gray.

The people of the capital all realized that the snow falling from the sky was actually all gray.

Because that sword that had descended from the night over the capital had originally been the ash from the burning of a letter.

The Divine Empress gazed at the Ebony Phoenix Hairpin in her right hand, silently thinking about something.

The wind blowing over the Dew Platform blew away a piece of ashen snow that had stuck to the hairpin, revealing the hairpin's original appearance.

The dark red phoenix head on the wooden hairpin was still as noble and beautiful as ever, but if one examined it carefully, one would be able to see a very shallow sword cut.

The Ebony Phoenix Hairpin originally had a very shallow blade cut. Now it had a sword cut that was just as inconspicuous.

Only she knew that this indicated that Su Li had already gotten infinitely closer to that person who had left the blade cut on her wooden hairpin all those years ago.

Tonight's battle was a draw.

The sword intent Su Li had left behind was actually able to withstand her Ebony Phoenix Hairpin. This somewhat surprised her.

Soon after, her lips curved into a derisive smile.

"You don't want to leave, but you're forced to leave. All those

entrapped by love are mediocre people. Even if you reached even higher heights on the path of the sword, so what?"

She suddenly sensed something and turned south to a certain part of the city. Her eyebrows raised, she coldly said, "Daring to stick around, truly a thing that doesn't know the meaning of death!"

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There were many people that did not want to leave, such as the old Daoist nun.

She had gone to the Orthodox Academy to establish her power and kill people, but she ended up being repelled by Su Li's sword intent. Battered and exhausted, she borrowed the darkness to escape.

As one of the Storms of the Eight Directions, how could she resign herself to this?

So she did not truly leave, instead borrowing the protective array of a certain noble clan in the southern part of the city to conceal her Qi.

Then, she saw that battle in the night sky. As she stood in the quiet garden and watched those streams of light gradually fade

away, thinking about the enormous sword of flames and the Black Phoenix, the old Daoist nun displayed an abnormally nasty expression. Tianhai's strength and cultivation had actually reached this level. Could it be that the Saints were all concealing their true strengths and were actually stronger than their group by an entire level? But when had Su Li advanced his cultivation to such a level?

After watching this battle, she was forced to admit that a massive gap lay between her and the likes of Tianhai and Su Li. It was even highly likely that she would never be able to reach their level for the rest of her life. This fact made her feel thoroughly defeated, and then she got angrier and angrier, so angry that she wanted to kill someone.

She had not left the capital just now precisely because she wanted to kill someone. Su Li's sword intent had already been shattered by the Ebony Phoenix Hairpin, and she believed no one would imagine that, with her status and cultivation, she would so treacherously go back to the Orthodox Academy and kill someone. Who could obstruct her?

A killing intent filled with venomous hatred appeared in her eyes, boundless frigid blue-green waves surging within.

She took up her almost completely bare horsetail whisk and, with a face brimming with murderous intent, began walking towards the Orthodox Academy.

But just as she raised her foot, a voice rang out by her ear, "I've always believed that fate is a quite unreasonable thing and from you, I have obtained the finest evidence. How did such a wretched

and obscene old woman like you obtain the favor of the starry sky and enter the Divine Domain?"

This voice was very cold, very majestic.

Simultaneously, a cold and majestic gaze descended from some far and high-up place, descending upon the old Daoist nun's body.

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# Chapter 543 – This Is The True Letter He Left For The World

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When the old Daoist nun heard the voice, her expression suddenly changed. She raised her head in the direction of the Dew Platform and opened her mouth to speak.

The Tianhai Divine Empress stood at the edge of the Dew Platform, her face turned towards that estate in the south, her gaze august and majestic, like a real beam of light.

The moment the old Daoist nun entered the capital, she had sensed it.

When the old Daoist nun tortured a dog to death in an alley and severed the hand Guan Bai used to hold his sword, she had offended her.

Perhaps many would think that neither the wild dog nor Guan Bai were worth a thing compared to the old Daoist nun.

But the Divine Empress did not think this way, because this was her world.

Under the blue sky, the most diseased wild dog was still her dog and the least important person was still her subject.

Of course, if the old Daoist nun had obediently departed after

being repelled by Su Li's sword intent, she would have given face to the old Daoist nun's husband and not appeared.

But the old Daoist nun should not have continued to remain in the capital.

This was disrespecting her.

The old Daoist nun especially should not have remained in that estate.

This was taking advantage of her awe-inspiring renown.

The Divine Empress did not like it, so she did not want to hear the old Daoist nun's explanation.

"Scram," she expressionlessly declared.

With this single word, the jade ruyi at her waist instantly transformed into a stream of light that shot off towards the distant southern part of the city.

The light transformed into a black dragon. It carried the might of a thunderstorm but traveled noiselessly, as if it had become one with the night.

In the entire capital, only two or three people could sense the appearance of this black dragon.

In the cavernous space beneath New North Bridge, that little girl whose appearance was suffused with fiendish intent was dining on the roast chicken Chen Changsheng had brought over several days ago, at the same time complaining about how it had already been quite a few days since he had visited, and also at the same time filled with the hope that she could learn the Mount Li Sword Style from him. If she could cultivate to Su Li's level in the future, then how could the chains behind her keep her jailed?

Suddenly, she knit her brows and gazed upward, her petite face tinged with fear.

Borrowing the cover of the night, the black dragon that was the transformed jade ruyi reached the southern part of the city.

The word 'scram' exploded in the old Daoist nun's ear like thunder.

Her expression immediately changed and without the slightest delay, she turned and left. Simultaneously, the horsetail whisk fell down, laying behind her layer after layer of blue-green ocean.

With a whoosh, the jade ruyi arrived in the serene garden and pierced through the horsetail whisk!

The black dragon was like an ocean, stirring countless storms!

With a boom, the old Daoist nun's back was struck, her clothes

instantly torn to shreds, and she coughed up a mouthful of true blood.

She no longer dared to linger. Forcefully enduring the heavy wound on her back, she used a secret technique and leapt into darkness, vanishing from view.

A moment later, a torch lit up the tranquil garden.

Tianhai Chenwu and several of his most important sons and nephews stood by the garden wall, their complexions extremely ugly.

The wall here, as well as the bamboo, were stained with the old Daoist nun's true blood, the spots gleaming with a golden light.

"Auntie is angry."

"It's not like we wanted to kill Chen Changsheng, we just wanted to cut down a little of the Orthodoxy's arrogance...but the Empress won't even allow this, so just what are we supposed to do?"

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The Pope sat in his chair, gazing at the Green Leaf in the pot that was growing ever more robust as he thought about tonight's

events. He seemed to fall a little into a daze, speaking to himself, "Senior Brother, your conclusion back then was correct, she truly is stronger than anyone could have imagined...and I also think that this isn't even her at her strongest."

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Besides powerful figures on the level of the Pope and the old Daoist nun, the most important thing in tonight's battle, besides Su Li displaying the universally shocking level he had reached on the path of the sword, was the tyrannical and incomparably powerful Black Phoenix. At this moment, people finally confirmed that the Divine Empress was truly as she was described in rumors and conjectures, possessing the sublimely noble blood of the Heavenly Phoenix. It was no wonder she cherished Xu Yourong so deeply. Viewing it from the angle of innate blood, she had decided that she could treat Xu Yourong as her real daughter.

Very few people knew that before the heaven-shaking battle between the Divine Empress and Su Li, two other battles had occurred in the capital. In normal times, those two battles between experts of the Divine Domain would inevitably attract countless discussions, but tonight, these two battles could only be relegated to unremarkable footnotes.

No one knew that one of the Eight Storms, Wuqiong Bi, infiltrated the capital in the night, wanting to go to the Orthodox Academy and recover some face for her dearly beloved sole son. In the end, she suffered the double suppression of Su Li and the

Divine Empress. Not only was she unable to recover any face, she even suffered severe injuries and was forced to retreat in an absolutely dismal state.

Not too much later, the seven letters Su Li had left for the continent were finally found out.

The Myriad Willows Garden outside Hanqiu City had been burned into scorched earth. This was a matter impossible to hide. The Zhu clan and Emotion-Severing Sect of Tianliang County suddenly became much more low-key. At the same time, the Longevity Sect's Elder Liang suddenly died from his illness while its other two elders caught a serious disease. Thus, the last few greats of the first generation of experts that remained from that sudden change ten-odd years ago faded away. The Longevity Sect announced to the world that it would immediately seclude itself for three years, even choosing to remain uninvolved in the major event soon to come to fruition, the confluence of the north and south. After this, it issued no other opinions.

For so many major events to occur in such swift succession, anybody could tell that it had something to do with Su Li.

But of course, what truly stunned the entire world was still that battle on that snowy night in the capital between the Tianhai Divine Empress and Su Li.

Originally, when news that Su Li and the Holy Maiden had chosen to shun the world and leave together reached the southerners, many of them believed that he had been unable to bear the pressure of the Zhou people and deserted. He had been so

deeply loved then, now their hate cut all the deeper, especially those young southerners who had once regarded him as an idol, their words containing much more disrespect and incomparable loathing.

However, Su Li was still Su Li. As the heaven-soaring tree that had stood straight and tall over the south for several hundred years, how could he just escape and leave? How could he leave in such a silent, subdued, and even wronged manner? Before he left, he would certainly settle all gratitudes and grudges.

He had once cold-bloodedly and emotionlessly killed many people and this world also had many reasons to detest him, to be hostile to him, but there were not too many places in this world that he held grudges against. Looking over these past few years, it was only the shame and injuries incurred in his journey back south from the snowy plains that remained unwashed. Those shameless disciples that had stirred up the internal chaos of Mount Li still lived, so the Myriad Willows Garden was burned down, Zhu Luo was crippled, and the Longevity Sect would gradually vanish into the long river of history. As for the gratitude part of the 'gratitudes and grudges', there was naturally that letter in Chen Changsheng's bosom, Scholartree Manor was suddenly gifted with a vast tract of good farmland, a certain famous assassin suddenly obtained an amnesty personally issued by the Tianhai Divine Empress, and that settled that.

Of course, at the final moment, he had not forgotten to do one thing that he had truthfully always wanted to do, but that he had never had the chance to.

A true competition of strength with the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Many years ago, when Su Li was still very young, he had already become the number one assassin on the Ranking of Assassins. There had once been countless people willing to pay countless taels of gold, or even entire counties and provinces, as the price to have him assassinate the Tianhai Divine Empress, but he had never accepted their offers, not even hesitating to part ways with those subordinates that had followed him.

After another few years, he had become the greatest Martial Granduncle of his generation in the Mount Li Sword Sect. The Chen Imperial clan and many important personages of the south, including the elders from his hometown, asked him in the name of all that was righteous, with sincere words and tear-soaked faces, to wield his sword and enter the capital, to eliminate the scourge that was the Demon Empress for the sake of all the people of the world. But he still did not agree.

Ten-odd years ago, the Longevity Sect and the Liang Household joined hands in capturing his pregnant wife to compel him to kill Tianhai, but he still did not do it.

It wasn't because at the time, he had not cultivated to his current level in the path of the sword and had no confidence in challenging a true Saint, nor was it because he wanted the situation to be unstable and the human world to be in strife, thus allowing the Demon Army to invade southwards. Rather, it was because, at that time, it was other people that wanted him to challenge Tianhai.

Su Li was just this sort of person. The more someone wanted him



to do something, the less he wanted to do it. Now that he wanted to leave this world, no one dared to order him to do anything, nor did anyone dare to bother him, but now he really wished to see whether he or Tianhai was stronger.

Ultimately, the result was that there was no result, but it could be believed that he was very satisfied.

As he departed this world, Su Li made the world more exciting for a while. From a character standpoint, he was someone that dearly loved excitement and he was worried that a world without him would seem too dull. Or perhaps he was also worried that after he left this world, he would not be able to see so much excitement for a very long time.

When he ascended the world's stage, the sight was glorious to behold, blindingly dazzling, his talent shocking and magnificent. When he left the world, he similarly departed with booms and gusto, confident and easy beyond compare. It could be believed that the world would find it impossible to forget his name, even if he would not appear for a very long time.

He acted this way with another purpose: to establish a basis for Mount Li and for the southerners.

The Burning Heaven Sword had illuminated the capital, shining together in the night sky with Wooden Sword Little Phoenix.

He was telling the Tianhai Divine Empress and the Pope that the agreement they reached back then should be fulfilled. After the

confluence of north and south, they had to treat the southerners well.

Simultaneously, he was telling the entire continent, "Don't take advantage of the fact that I'm not here to try anything on Mount Li.

"Or else, you'll die in as ugly a fashion as that elder of the Longevity Sect and your homes and monasteries will be scorched to the earth like the Myriad Willows Garden.

"The above-mentioned."

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# Chapter 544 – The Confluence Of The North And South And Beginning To Break The Array

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Su Li left, but life continued, and that grand event of the human world was methodically pushed forward.

To speak truthfully, it was precisely because Su Li left that this grand event had a chance of success, that it could continue.

On the seventeenth day after Xu Yourong and the group from Holy Maiden Peak arrived in the capital, the Qiushan clan head, representing the various noble clans of the south, also entered the borders of the Great Zhou. The Longevity Sect had closed up its sect for three years, but those sects and monasteries nominally attached to it had sent out able representatives.

As time passed, more and more representatives of the various factions of the south began to take their seats in the negotiating room.

The confluence of the north and south was no longer a name that only existed in ancient records and the imagination. It was getting closer and closer to reality.

To the southerners, the greatest problem facing them was that after the departure of Su Li and the Holy Maiden, they possessed no expert of the Divine Domain. No matter if it was at the negotiation table or at some other place, the drinking table for

instance, they couldn't help but feel lacking in confidence.

Unexpectedly, neither the Imperial Court nor the Orthodoxy took advantage of this difference in strength to suggest any sort of unreasonable demand. On the contrary, they displayed a rarely seen generosity and open-mindedness, making a series of guarantees and oaths for the benefit of the south's future.

Only the truly wise could see the crossing of swords concealed behind, or taking place before, this negotiation.

This was the crossing of swords between Su Li and the Tianhai Divine Empress and the Pope.

With unimaginable wisdom and courage, he renounced his right to take revenge on those that had pursued him on his journey back south. When he departed together with the Holy Maiden, the south straight away lost all of its confidence, thus preventing negotiations from once more mirroring themselves in the mud as had happened countless times before.

Then the Divine Empress and the Pope had to give him sufficient return, to give the south abnormally generous conditions.

In the details of this negotiation, these returns, this generous treatment, was this: after the confluence of the north and south, the south would preserve as much of its independence as possible.

This independence already surpassed the wildest dreams of the

powers from the south.

They didn't need to alter the prefectures, to redraw the provinces or counties. They were free to select their own local officials without requiring the approval of the Ministry of Appointments in the capital, and only needed to have them examined in the capital once within three years. Taxation was also extremely favorable, and in terms of payments from the state treasury, it was even more inclined towards the relatively poor prefectures of the south.

Besides this, the south obtained many other benefits, especially with regards to the Grand Examination and the Imperial Examination. From now on, they no longer needed to take a portion of the capital's allotment, but were treated like the rest of the provinces and counties, calculating a quota from the number of people on the official census. With the performance of the south in the recent years, they would obtain a massive advantage in the Grand Examination.

Of course, the southerners could not obtain benefits without paying anything. Long before the negotiations were concluded, several items were already confirmed. These were that in the future, the army and foreign affairs would both be administered from the capital. The greatest change involved the ten thousand li of unbroken border in the north with the snowy plains. In the past, the sects and noble clans of the south would also send experts to garrison the northern forts and resist the great army of the demons. However, these experts were all honored guests, listening to suggestions, but not orders. Now, however, these experts would all be directly inserted into the army. Coupled with the changes occurring in logistics and other such aspects, it could be assumed that the human army would quickly make a huge leap in strength.

Moreover, this had always been the most important, even sole, goal of the confluence of north and south.

As the negotiations over the confluence of the north and south slowly headed towards success, the experts and soldiers of the human world strengthened their watch over the north. The supply wagons from the south carried an unending stream of rations and fodder to the eleven critical border passes. They were prepared at any time to clash head-on with the demon cavalry riding south, because it was very obvious that the demons could not helplessly stand by as the human world succeeded in the confluence of the north and the south. They would definitely do something, especially that absolutely treacherous Military Advisor, Black Robe. Perhaps he had already put his crafty schemes into motion.

The situation up north was rather tense, and the two sides of the negotiation table were also rather tense, but these were two different types of tension. In these negotiations, Xu Yourong played an extremely important role. It could even be said that from a psychological perspective, she was the most important representative because she was both a person of Zhou and the Holy Maiden of the south at the same time. Naturally, her days became very busy, constantly calling upon the various representatives from the south while at the same time communicating with the Great Zhou Imperial Court. Fortunately, she lived in the Imperial Palace and so it was very easy for her to meet with the Divine Empress.

Chen Changsheng had already not seen her for ten-odd days and was somewhat concerned, but he knew that she was doing something extremely important, so he would naturally not complain. As a person who valued time above all else, he did not

waste his days on longing and waiting. He borrowed the chill of the deep winter to hone his mind, comprehend the five stone pearls, and silently recite the Halving Blade Style. Occasionally, he would give a lesson to the new students of the Orthodox Academy, but he would spend more of his time endlessly studying. Of course, he did not forget a few other important things.

On a certain normal winter day of snow and wind, he purchased a large amount of food and little knick-knacks from the market. Under the Yellow Paper Umbrella, he avoided the countless eyes around the Orthodox Academy and, under the gazes of the Imperial Guards, reached that tree outside the palace walls. Then, availing himself of a great wind and sweeping snow that confused the eyes, he leaped into that well of New North Bridge.

The most oil-absorbent bamboo paper took up a space on the ground about half the size of a house, and countless hot and piping foodstuffs were tidily arranged upon it, releasing steam and all sorts of different aromas. There was steamed deer tail, roast goose, roast duck, and even a dozen or so sticky rice dumplings, but this time, there was no steamed bear paw...because of Xuanyuan Po, there was no one in the Orthodox Academy that currently ate that dish.

Chen Changsheng used two fingers to take out a clean handkerchief from his sleeve. After carefully wiping his hands clean of oil, he raised his head up to the Black Dragon and said, "Tang Tang made Clear Lake Restaurant the cafeteria of the Orthodox Academy...I forgot to tell you...but besides blue lobster, I bought a few more things from the outside. I feel they might taste even better."

At the very center of all the food was a small mountain of blue lobster.

Chen Changsheng was smiling as he spoke, his smile very clean and containing a joy that came from the heart.

To get so many fine foods for the Black Dragon to eat, he truly felt very satisfied.

The Black Dragon's mountainous body slowly descended. A cold and icy aura hard to describe with words instantly pressed down on the steam rising up from the food.

Chen Changsheng hurriedly pulled out his sword and slashed down, and a sword intent faintly suffused with a fiery light rose up. The food was instantly warmed back up and was not frozen into chunks of ice.

He had used the Burning Heaven Sword.

On that night several days ago, he had comprehended the sword intent in that letter for a very long time. Afterwards, he saw the battle between Su Li's Burning Heaven Sword and the Divine Empress's Ebony Phoenix Hairpin and made some gains.

Although he could not be said to have reached great heights on the path of the sword, at his current cultivation, he could already be counted as being completely integrated with the sword.



Except that...to use the incredibly difficult-to-comprehend Burning Heaven Sword to heat food was inappropriate no matter how one looked at it.

The Black Dragon did not believe this; she felt it extremely appropriate.

She was very satisfied with Chen Changsheng's painstaking preparations to lay out this floor of food and mountain of blue lobster, and she was even more satisfied with his way of heating food by using the Burning Heaven Sword. This was because it indicated that in his eyes, her eating fresh and hot food was more important than preserving any of the so-called dignity of the path of the sword.

She decided to forgive him for the fact that it had already been a month since he had last visited.

A dignified and remote, simple yet complex, dragon cry resounded through the cold and gloomy space.

Chen Changsheng was a little taken aback, not understanding why the Black Dragon was in no rush to eat and instead wanted to do his dragon language lessons first. Then he suddenly recalled that he had brought the Black Dragon food so many times, but he had seemingly never seen her eat in front of him.

"Ah..."

"Uh..."

"Ee..."

"Woo..."

"Shu..."

The cavernous space would occasionally resound with the Black Dragon's low and dignified dragon cries while Chen Changsheng would clumsily and seriously learn the tones of the language.

Chen Changsheng learned with single-minded devotion, all the way until his voice was hoarse, his sea of consciousness blank, and his body extremely feeble. Yet he did not forget to slash down with the Burning Heaven Sword at certain intervals, assisting the roast goose and roast duck in maintaining their original fragrance at the most appropriate temperature.

The whiskers of the Black Dragon would occasionally drift upwards, spilling pieces of snow over that small mountain of blue lobster, producing a very beautiful picture.

After a long time had passed, today's dragon language lesson finally concluded. The Black Dragon gently puffed a breath of air onto his face, instantly covering it in a layer of frost. He used his hand to wipe the frost off and felt that with this sudden chill, he felt refreshed and his exhaustion had instantly vanished.

"I'm going over there to take a look."

Chen Changsheng did not forget the most important matter. Rushing over to the back, he saw those two chains, the other ends of the chains attached to a stone wall and held in the hands of those two legendary generals. Compared to the massive body of the Black Dragon, these two chains were like two fine threads, but they tightly imprisoned the Black Dragon.

It could be assumed that in the past few centuries, the Black Dragon had attempted countless times to snap these two chains, yet it had never succeeded.

Chen Changsheng had spent the greater part of the year after returning to the capital from the Garden of Zhou thinking of a way to break these chains, but he had also failed.

The array that Wang Zhice had laid on this stone wall was too complex and wondrous, like the sea of stars itself.

The two Divine Generals Yu Gong and Qin Zhong had left a strand of their spiritual sense on the stone wall. They were far too powerful, like bolts of lightning.

The previous generation of blooming flowers was already separated from the present by close to a thousand years, but those legends were still legends. Even when they were just strands of heroic souls, they were still not something he could oppose, or even a domain that he could touch—this domain was called Divine.

Chen Changsheng sat beneath the stone wall. Under the attentive gazes of these legends, he quietly read a book in his hand.

The book he was reading was rather old, its name "A Sheyang Daoist Master's Illustrated Collection of Arrays".

No one knew the specifics of Wang Zhice's teacher. In those times, when he was an ordinary lecturer at the Heavenly Dao Academy, in his middle age, he suddenly bathed the capital in the radiance of the stars and shook the continent, but no one knew who his teacher was. Chen Changsheng had searched through several hundred books in the library of the Orthodox Academy. In Wang Zhice's hometown, he discovered an ordinary Daoist with the surname Wu.

Wang Zhice's hometown was Sheyang.

This Daoist surnamed Wu was the Daoist Master from Sheyang.

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## Chapter 545 - Ice And Snow Have Never Been Smart

(This title is a play on the Chinese idiom 冰雪聪明, which literally translates to 'intelligence like ice and snow'. Ice and snow are regarded as very pure and beautiful substances, so a person that has an intelligence like ice and snow is an extremely intelligent person.)

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This Daoist surnamed Wu was not the least bit famous. In his entire life, he had only written three books, one of which was this illustrated collection of arrays. At the very beginning, Chen Changsheng had only casually glanced through this book, not holding much hope, but the more he read, the more he felt that something was wrong—the arrays that this Daoist surnamed Wu had recorded in this illustrated collection were all very simple, even somewhat clumsy. To those who had succeeded in cultivating the Dao, they weren't even worth a sneer, but in a few of this book's pages, he faintly sensed traces of the Boiling Stone Forest Array.

As time slowly passed, Chen Changsheng continued to study the book. He wasn't apprehensive or jittery in the least, his eyes calm and firm.

He had promised the Black Dragon that he would save her, so he would definitely do so. This year he could not, next year he could not, but there would eventually come a year when he could. He firmly believed that the Black Dragon would definitely not be imprisoned underground for another several centuries. Of course, all this was predicated on the basis that he would live past the age of twenty.

"Several nights ago, I saw a burning sword...it was so formidable."

A cold and clear voice resounded from behind him. At some point, the Black Dragon had noiselessly floated behind him. When the Black Dragon mentioned the burning sword, a hint of fear flickered through the depths of its dragon eyes. "That was...Su Li's sword?"

Chen Changsheng had long since ascertained the Black Dragon's gender, but he was still somewhat unaccustomed to hearing this sort of voice.

On the ten-thousand-li journey back south, because the Black Dragon had helped him suppress his injuries, she had consumed too much of her divine soul and spent most of the time asleep, but she was forced to admit that there was one other important reason she did not wake up: because she did not want to be discovered by Su Li.

At the time, Su Li was severely wounded, even weaker than a normal human, but the Black Dragon still held an instinctual fear of him. In the very first meeting by the hot springs in the snowy mountains, she had sensed that Su Li's sword...had once killed many of her race, even members that were stronger than her.

"Senior Su Li and the Divine Empress fought a battle. The final result...should be a tie, I think?"

"And what of you? You haven't come to see me for so many days. You must be very busy, but busy with what?"

"I was studying books related to arrays."

Chen Changsheng glanced up at the two massive images of the Divine Generals on the stone wall, then continued, "...the rest of the time, I was preparing for a battle."

"You're the next Pope—who dares to challenge you?"

"Many people."

"You can not fight with them."

"I can't with that person."

"Who?"

"Xu Yourong."

"...that fiancée of yours?"

For some inexplicable reason, the Black Dragon's voice became much more indifferent, its tone becoming much flatter.

Chen Changsheng did not notice this, saying, "I also don't know

if she is or is not my fiancée."

Complex emotions flashed through the Black Dragon's eyes as it said, "Tell me about it."

After a moment's hesitation, he gave the Black Dragon a full account of what had happened in these past few days, whether it was the events before and after the Bridge of Helplessness or when he entered the palace in the snowy night. He didn't even conceal from it his subtlest and innermost emotions.

This was the first time he had narrated these matters between him and Xu Yourong. Although he had told Tang Thirty-Six, he had definitely left out a few details. But he hid absolutely nothing from the Black Dragon who had saved his life several times and who he deeply trusted—although he knew that with the almost endless life essence of the Dragon race, this Black Dragon had barely entered its youth, since it had already lived several centuries, he subconsciously treated the Black Dragon as a virtuous senior worthy of respect.

In brief, he deeply trusted the Black Dragon and also found it very convenient, so he said many things to it without excluding a single detail.

The underground space was peaceful, but then a sheet of frost suddenly appeared on the stone wall, covering the faces of those two legendary Divine Generals.

The Black Dragon floated down, Chen Changsheng reflected in



its pitch-black eyes. Then, it slowly opened its mouth.

In his last few visits to New North Bridge, whenever Chen Changsheng researched the array and became mentally and physically exhausted from thinking of ways to help the Black Dragon break free of Wang Zhice's imprisonment, the Black Dragon would lower its noble head and breath out a faint and delightfully cold dragon breath. With its help, Chen Changsheng was able to drive away his exhaustion and refresh his mind, similar to the scene just a moment ago.

Chen Changsheng was already used to this, so when he saw the Black Dragon move, he very naturally closed his eyes, preparing to welcome the coolness speckled with frost.

With a howl, a low and somber dragon cry rose up.

Dragon breath fell upon Chen Changsheng's head and body.

This was not a cool breath speckled with frost, but the true dragon breath of the Black Frost Dragon.

In an instant, Chen Changsheng's body was frozen into a crystal-clear block of ice.

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Water lightly slapped against the block of ice, sloshing as it did.

This was not the Luo River, but the small pool in the Imperial Palace. Due to an array, the Imperial Palace experienced spring in every season of the year. Although the pool was small, it had not frozen.

To Chen Changsheng, this was both good and bad.

A massive transparent block of ice bobbed up and down in the pool, his frozen body within.

The liquid state of the pond was a good thing because the sloshing of the water would melt the ice as quickly as possible. But it was also bad because the water in the pool was constantly bobbing up and down and the block of ice could not settle down, rolling over on occasion. Within, he found all this very difficult to endure and also very embarrassing.

The emotion of embarrassment would normally occur when one was discovered in an embarrassing situation.

If no one saw, then no matter if one was like Tang Thirty-Six, hugging a tree in a snowy forest while endlessly hiccupping, or if one was like now, in a block of ice bobbing up and down with the waves, none of it mattered. The reason Chen Changsheng felt so embarrassed at this moment was that there had been a person watching him from the start.

To be precise, it was not a person.

The Black Goat stood by the pool, its head slightly tilted as it gazed at the frozen him in the pool.

It had already gazed at him for a long time, seemingly finding it very interesting and never once leaving.

Thus, Chen Changsheng felt more and more embarrassed.

If he could have broken through this block of ice, he would long since have done it, but as expected, the dragon breath of the Black Frost Dragon was extremely unusual. It had actually managed to freeze his sea of consciousness and body together. Even though he now had a complete grasp over the Burning Heaven Sword and could condense sword intent into flames, he was powerless to break through the ice around him.

He had used a long time, but he had only been able to arduously melt a thin layer of ice from his face and barely get his eyes open.

As time slowly flowed on, the block of ice continued to bob up and down. The Black Goat continued to watch him, full of interest. It seemed to not understand what was he doing. Was he practicing some sort of Daoist technique?

The ice in front of Chen Changsheng's face continued to melt. After opening his eyes, he was finally able to open his mouth, so he

hurriedly yelled, "Please help me."

Precisely because he called out, the icy water flowed into his mouth and nose, causing him to choke in pain.

Although the voice was very weak, the Black Goat was able to understand the movements of his mouth.

Just as it had done for the past two years, when Chen Changsheng needed its help, the Black Goat would always respond to his requests.

The Black Goat slowly ambled into the pool and used its horn to push the big block of ice onto the stone steps, then it gently exerted its strength.

With a crisp clack, the block of ice cracked open and Chen Changsheng fell out of it.

His body was completely soaked in icy water and he had been frozen into a miserable state. His face was pale and the cold had encroached on both his Ethereal Palace and sea of consciousness. He had actually suffered rather substantial internal injuries.

Frustration and fear flashed through his eyes.

Why had the Black Dragon become so cruel and ruthless? Just how had he offended it?

The clouds above the Imperial Palace gradually dispersed, revealed that weak and seemingly fake sun.

No matter how weak and unreal, it was ultimately still the real sun, its light warm and gentle.

Chen Changsheng removed from his sheath a set of back-up clothes. Because his hands and feet were frozen stiff, he required a long time to finish changing.

He leaned against a pillar of this cold and cheerless palace, closing his eyes and taking in the sun's light to warm his body.

The Black Goat slowly bent its forelegs and quietly squatted down by his side. Then, it also slowly closed its eyes.

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Far in the future, when Chen Changsheng recalled this winter day, he would always feel a great sorrow and a faint sense of loss.

He was still very young at the time, so there were many things he did not understand, many details he did not notice.

Those details lay within the underground space illuminated by

the Night Pearls and also at the side of the pool illuminated by the sun.

He believed that the Black Dragon was a senior, that it could be trusted, that he could conveniently describe to it the object of his affection.

This statement contained two absolute mistakes.

The Black Dragon was naturally worthy of his trust, but she was not his senior. When she listened to the story of Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong, she felt it extremely inconvenient.

Because she was a little girl, she had good enough reason to be angry.

In the cold and gloomy underground cavern, the little girl was eating.

She did not wish to eat before Chen Changsheng with the appearance of the Black Dragon, because that form would eat too ravenously without the slightest finesse, and she was afraid that she would scare him.

But Chen Changsheng did not understand, so she was very angry.

When she heard about Chen Changsheng's encounter with Xu Yourong on the Bridge of Helplessness, she was also very angry.

She used to think that if he never knew about this matter, it would be fine, but it turned out...because of the food or because she was angry or for some other reason, her cheeks swelled and her pretty little face was a picture of unhappiness, the bloody wound like a cinnabar birthmark between her eyebrows brimming with a fiendish aura, her dignified vertical pupils chock-full of grievance.

"Heartless youth! If you hadn't also obtained a wound between your eyebrows on the Bridge of Helplessness and seemed a little like me...I would have swallowed you up just then."

She took up a blue lobster with both hands and, treating it like a piece of sugarcane, fiercely and hatefully bit into it, at the same fiercely and hatefully thinking.

It didn't take long for the several dozen types of food that Chen Changsheng had brought to all be devoured by her.

Under her black dress, her belly slightly bulged.

Then, she slowly lowered her head and sat in the shadows.

In truth, she didn't care about what she ate.

Whatever she ate, she always ate alone.

She just didn't want to eat alone.

She had already eaten alone for several hundred years.

She wanted to eat together with someone else.

Maybe not even eat, just chatting would be fine.

Not even chatting, just sitting would be fine.

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# Chapter 546 - Who Will Come And Bestow Upon You A Name And Surname

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Chen Changsheng reclined against the pillar for a very long time. Only when the sun had moved west and his body was warm did he finally open his eyes.

The Black Goat walked in front of him, preparing to lead him out.

Chen Changsheng shook his head at it, saying, "I still have some other things to do."

He continued to sit where he was, gazing at the pieces of ice in the pool in silence as he mulled over something.

The Black Goat's eyes, dark as the night, revealed a bewildered expression.

After quite some time had passed, Chen Changsheng stood up. He did not leave the Imperial Palace and return to the Orthodox Academy, but instead went to another palace hall.

He had already visited this palace hall several times. Every time, he would come under the cloak of the night and speak a few words with her through the window. This was the first time he walked into the hall.

As expected, Shuang'er had also entered the Imperial Palace. She instantly paled on seeing his face and nearly cried out in alarm. With great difficulty, she calmed herself down, but when she served tea, her hands shook so much that she almost soaked his body.

"Don't take it to heart, I can say with great certainty that she isn't thinking about seizing the moment to take revenge on you."

Xu Yourong looked at him and calmly asked, "What happened?"

She was keenly aware that since she had requested for their relationship not be known, Chen Changsheng would definitely not risk it being discovered for a normal situation.

Chen Changsheng dithered for a while before saying, "I...have a friend who's been imprisoned in a place for a very long time and I want to rescue him."

Hearing this, Xu Yourong fell silent, then softly asked, "And?"

"In the past, he might have done some bad things, but...he's already been imprisoned for so long, it's really very pitiful."

Chen Changsheng didn't know how to talk about this matter, so his words were rather disorderly, "But I'm powerless to do it, so..."

Xu Yourong did not wait for him to finish. Calmly looking him in the eyes, she asked, "You're sure you want to do this?"

Chen Changsheng vacantly stared back for a moment, then very seriously replied, "Yes, I want to do this."

Xu Yourong continued to stare into his eyes, asking, "Your friend...is [Zhusha](#)?"

(Zhusha means 'Cinnabar')

Chen Changsheng was somewhat confused, "Zhusha?"

Xu Yourong was rather surprised, asking, "You don't know her name?"

Startled, Chen Changsheng replied, "You know who I'm talking about?"

Xu Yourong explained, "Zhusha is precisely the name of the little dragon girl. It's said that back then, it was Wang Zhice that named her so."

Chen Changsheng looked at her in shock, saying, "You know about the Black Dragon?"

Xu Yourong nodded.

Chen Changsheng said nothing for a very long time. The Black Dragon was a taboo of the Great Zhou Imperial Palace, a secret known by very few. However, Xu Yourong was the Holy Maiden

and was also taught and raised by the Divine Empress. For her to know of this matter was truly not difficult to imagine.

"As it turns out...she was called Zhusha."

"As it turns out, you didn't know."

"Why was it Lord Wang Zhice that gave her this name?"

"Many years ago, the entire Golden Dragon tribe suddenly vanished, so the respected Black Frost Dragons became the sole candidate for the next leaders of the Dragon race. But that generation's most powerful Black Frost Dragon possessed a soul that had an incomparable longing for freedom and was not willing to bear this burden. Quietly and invisibly, it came to the human world and then encountered Zhou Dufu."

"After that?"

"The noblest, most powerful, most proud Black Frost Dragon in the past one thousand years fell to the earth and became the Garden of Zhou's Sunset Valley."

Chen Changsheng fell silent.

Back in the Garden of Zhou, he had once seen with his own eyes that magnificent sight of the winding mountain range ablaze in the twilight. He had also felt that peculiar feeling arising from the soul of the Black Dragon, but he could never have imagined that Sunset

Valley had originally been the fallen body of that Black Frost Dragon.

"After that?"

"Zhusha was this Black Frost Dragon's daughter. Somehow, she managed to leave the dragon islands in the Southern Sea and arrive alone to the human world...according to the records left behind in the Li Palace and the Imperial Court, she said that before her father left, he had forgotten to bestow upon her a name, and the name given to her by the tribal elders was too long, too ugly-sounding, and too difficult to remember. She didn't like it, so she came to the human world to find her father and have him give her a better-sounding name."

"She just wanted a name?"

"Yes, so in those years, she was called the evil dragon searching for a name."

"Evil dragon?"

"Yes, after she came ashore on the continent from the Southern Sea, she destroyed many fishing villages and towns, killed many people, and almost caused chaos in the capital itself. You should know what happened after, Lord Wang Zhice made a plan to capture her and then used that array to imprison her under New North Bridge."

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "That's not called a plan, it's deception."

Xu Yourong thought it over, then agreed, "It truly is."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Why did Wang Zhice give her the name Zhusha?"

Xu Yourong noticed that this time when mentioning Wang Zhice, he did not address him as 'Lord', so she couldn't help but faintly smile.

"No one knows why, but there's definitely some profound meaning behind this naming that Lord Wang Zhice gave her."

She glanced at him as if it held some deeper meaning.

Chen Changsheng paid no attention to it, asking, "So then how old is she now?"

"If we equate the lives of the Dragon race to us humans, then she should be one or two years younger than us?"

"Although I thought about it before, I still found it somewhat weird...I've always called her Senior."

"You still want to rescue her?"

"Yes."

"Even if she once committed monstrous crimes?"

"You said before, she's only one or two years younger than us, so when she left the Southern Sea and came to the human world, how old was she? One or two years old?"

Chen Changsheng fell silent for a while, then continued, "I don't know what happened back then in those fishing villages and towns, nor do I have any intention of defending her, but she was just an infant back then. Even if she committed the most heinous of crimes, I think several hundred years of imprisonment is enough."

Xu Yourong very seriously pondered this, then softly replied, "It truly is enough."

Chen Changsheng was very happy that she shared the same opinion as him, but no matter how slow-witted he was, even he knew that his request was rather inappropriate. Thus, he did not become overjoyed, but instead even more prudent and cautious. His voice became much softer as he asked, "Can you help me?"

Xu Yourong looked back at him and earnestly replied, "Of course I can, but besides the Divine Empress and His Holiness, who could remove the array left behind by Lord Wang Zhice?"

Chen Changsheng recalled that conversation in the Li Palace he

had with his Martial Uncle, the Pope, after his return to the capital from the Garden of Zhou, and then shook his head.

Xu Yourong understood and said, "Although I haven't personally seen it, I can also imagine that this array is not something the two of us can break with our current level of strength."

"We can't wait around forever. No matter how many years pass, it's not like New North Bridge will actually become a real bridge."

"That's not necessarily the case. Even an ocean can become a mulberry field—the strength of time is far more powerful than we can imagine."

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# Chapter 547 - Rumors In The Capital

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"Don't tell me we have to wait another few hundred years?"

"Perhaps we really should research the strength of time. Those legends of the past could be even stronger, but not even they could possibly defeat time."

"In the three thousand scriptures of the Daoist Canon, only one book concerns time."

"Then we should first look at this Scroll of Time."

"Understood, then when the time comes, help me look over it."

With their plans decided and seeing that it was already late, Chen Changsheng stood up and bid farewell, then walked out of the hall.

Shuang'er stood outside the hall in the snow, from time to time taking note of any movement outside. Seeing him walk out, she revealed a very complex expression.

Chen Changsheng was prepared to say a few words to her when he suddenly heard Xu Yourong's voice come from behind him.

"Are you and Lady Zhusha very close?"

Chen Changsheng stood in a daze for some time before finally

understanding that the Lady Zhusha she spoke was exactly the young Black Dragon. Confused, he asked, "Close?"

"Mo Yu saw the two of you embracing once."

It was very obvious that Xu Yourong was deliberately keeping her voice extremely calm, because it was so calm that it was almost wooden.

Chen Changsheng was quite speechless, thinking, the Black Dragon is like a mountain—how could I embrace her?

"Could it be that you don't know...if she doesn't maintain her dragon body, she's actually a pretty young girl?"

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In the darkness, Chen Changsheng gazed silently at the calm surface of the pool and the remnants of shattered ice on its surface.

A young girl and a Black Dragon—perhaps it was only the external appearance changing, but they gave completely different impressions.

Having a name and not having a name was also an incredibly big difference.

Back then, Wang Zhice had given her a name, calling her Zhusha.

He had also given her two names—one was Zhizhi, the other Hongzhuang.

There seemed to be some faint connection between the two.

The Black Frost Dragon that had fallen in battle in the Garden of Zhou had possessed a noble soul that had a limitless longing for freedom.

She was this Black Frost Dragon's daughter and presumably also possessed a heart that had a limitless desire for freedom, but she was imprisoned for so many years.

Truly too pitiful.

Without speaking to this pool, he left.

On the night of the same day, he used the stone pearl left behind by Wang Zhice to enter the Garden of Zhou.

He paid no attention to that ocean-like monster tide that bowed to him, only noticing that the current Garden of Zhou was much better than it had been previously.

The lakes surrounding the plain had been dredged clean and the

collapsed cliffs tidied up.

He went to the lakeshore on the other side of the waterfall and found the Scroll of Time amongst those books that had been dried in the sun.

He returned to Sunset Valley and used the light coming from the horizon to begin reading this book.

After a long time passed, he put away the book, then said to the grand and lofty mountain range before him, "Please relax, I will definitely rescue Sir's daughter."

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In that courtyard in the principal alley of the Northern Military Department, Zhou Tong was also reading the Scroll of Time.

The common people currently only knew of him as a cruel and terrifyingly powerful official. Long forgotten was the fact that he had once been widely known for his scholarly erudition, and also the fact that he was a cultivator that had reached the peak of Star Condensation.

After Archbishop Mei Lisha returned to the sea of stars, he had been constantly studying the Scroll of Time. Recently, he had finally been able to comprehend some of the true meaning of this

Daoist scripture.

"Can one really change the speed at which time flows?"

As he gazed at the snow and the lonely crabapple tree in the courtyard, the sea of blood within his eyes boiled incessantly, seeming abnormally brutal and frightening. This represented the fact that his mind was currently in a state of shock, his sea of consciousness uneasy as a consequence. He even found it hard to maintain his unfeeling Dao heart.

As time passed, the sea of blood within his eyes gradually calmed, his pale face revealing a little exhaustion and sadness. He knew that from the moment he had decided to follow the Divine Empress and open the golden age, from the moment he had sunken into this sea of blood that was forever in turmoil, it would forever be impossible for him to reach the end of the long road of cultivation. Time and space were both domains that he could never touch, but this did not mean that there was no one in the world who could do this.

He believed that if one could advance into the legendary realm of Concealed Divinity or perhaps was assisted by some extremely powerful array, perhaps one could use the Scroll of Time to adjust the speed at which time flowed. Then this also meant that a certain person's age could have been adjusted by someone else; perhaps that youth and that Crown Prince Zhaoming were exactly the same age?

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Two rumors were spreading through the capital.

The first rumor was basically nonsense. It said that Little Principal Chen of the Orthodox Academy was a descendant of the Chen Imperial clan and was even highly likely to be that Crown Prince Zhaoming who had vanished without a trace during the coup in the palace back then. No one believed this theory because Chen Changsheng's age was clearly much younger than Crown Prince Zhaoming's. Moreover, compared to this seemingly quite shocking rumor, the denizens of the capital far preferred to believe that even colder and more sinister rumor: the pitiful Crown Prince Zhaoming had long since been choked to death in his infancy by the Divine Empress.

The second rumor attracted far more interest and had also received far more approval. Perhaps it was because Tang Thirty-Six had drunk too much wine one night and said it to that dancer in the restaurant, or perhaps it was because Shuang'er, when returning to the Divine General of the East's estate to take the handwarming stove her young lady often used, had subtly hinted at it under her madam's indirect questioning. Even more likely was that some truly lofty person would stand up on a high platform of the capital and occasionally direct their gaze down into the streets to discover the scene of the young man and woman walking side by side, the Yellow Paper Umbrella unable to hide Chen Changsheng's face...many people of the capital had heard that after the battle on the Bridge of Helplessness, the Holy Maiden and Little Principal Chen would often meet. It was said that Little Principal Chen would even occasionally enter the palace to find her.

Today, Prince Chen Liu was entertaining guests and Chen Changsheng was the guest of honor. Today, the primary theme of the gathering was appreciating snow, and when appreciating snow, there naturally had to be poetry recitations. Those several students of the Orthodox Academy that had followed Chen Changsheng to the Prince's estate to broaden their experiences competed in poetry with the students of the other Five Ivies. In a few rounds, they had all lost, but the statuses of Chen Changsheng and the Orthodox Academy were completely different from the past, so none of the teachers and students, whether they were from the Heavenly Dao Academy or from the Temple Seminary, would dare use this matter to sneer or ridicule them. However, the students of the Orthodox Academy still felt rather ashamed and would occasionally sneak glances in Chen Changsheng's direction.

Chen Changsheng naturally felt their gazes and very naturally began to miss Tang Thirty-Six. That guy was the ideal candidate for dealing with these sorts of situations. Whether it was being jeered at, being humiliated, or being ignored, perhaps their side's morale would be depressed and even fall into despair, but he would always have a way of reversing the mood.

Just as in the past, Tang Thirty-Six who had an inexplicable hatred for Prince Chen Liu was too lazy to even give an excuse, simply refusing to attend today's poetry gathering. But he wasn't too far away. Bringing along a dancing girl he was close with, he waited in the carriage outside the Prince's estate, pointing out the window at the falling snow and reciting poetry, playing the role of a romantic young master well enough.

The main gate of the Prince's estate opened and Prince Chen Liu

personally sent off Chen Changsheng and the students of the Orthodox Academy.

The falling snow had already stopped and many of those people of the capital that were fond of excitement had gathered outside the Prince's estate. The moment Chen Changsheng appeared, countless gazes instantly shot in his direction, simultaneously accompanied by countless whispered conversations. The quiet street outside the estate seemingly transformed into a classroom.



# Chapter 548 - A Date In The Mausoleum Of Books

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"Men really are all perverts. Everyone says that Little Principal Chen is resistant to feminine charms, but now even this seems fake. Didn't he only need a glance at the Holy Maiden and see how beautiful she was to immediately be filled with remorse?"

The people speaking these sorts of words were all housewives.

"Who could see the Holy Maiden's true appearance and still maintain such an iron heart? Moreover, Little Principal Chen and the Holy Maiden originally had an engagement—how could he control himself?"

Those who cautiously explained Chen Changsheng's attitude but whose words were still rather teasing were all men.

"Tell me, why do you think that Sir Principal played the fool and insisted on ending the engagement?"

"Who said the Principal ended the engagement? Hasn't that always been a rumor with not a single shred of proof?"

"News came from the Li Palace long ago. Not even the shadow of that marriage contract can be seen in the Hall of Subjugation."

"And ending an engagement is done just like that?"

"I'm just curious to know just what happened back then."

"That's a very long story. It's said that two years ago in spring, the Principal arrived in the capital from Xining Village and knocked upon the door of the Divine General of the East's estate..."

"Tsk, tsk, to receive such humiliation from the Divine General's estate, to be suppressed in such a manner, even I wouldn't be able to stand it, much less the Principal."

"Later on, the Principal worked with stamina and diligence. For him to have such good fortune now, perhaps he had been provoked too much at the very beginning. Now that he's in such a position of authority, he definitely has to turn around and deliver a slap to the face of the Divine General's estate. Ah, so they say, don't bully the poor youths; as long as we put our efforts in study and cultivation, in the future, we too can act with such daring and boldness."

"But...based on those rumors, isn't the Principal regretting his decision? Isn't this slapping himself in the face?"

"You're the one that said it."

This above conversation was actually carried on between the students of the Orthodox Academy.

Advancing in cultivation brought with it many benefits, but also brought many unexpected annoyances. For instance, one's five

senses would all become much sharper, so even if it was a housewife in the marketplace covering her mouth as she commented, even if it was the man from next door beaming with smiles as he quietly made fun of someone, or even if it was one's own students quietly whispering amongst themselves, one could hear them loud and clear.

Chen Changsheng sat in the carriage, gazing out the window at the drifting snow. He seemed very calm and only from his slightly clenched hands could one see that he was truthfully rather embarrassed.

Tang Thirty-Six had someone escort the dancing girl home, then sat across from Chen Changsheng. Looking at his expression, a smirk appeared on his face.

Chen Changsheng seemed focused on the snow, but in reality, he cared deeply about the reactions around him. From the day that rumor began spreading through the capital, he had become rather sensitive.

"What are you smiling about?"

"Smiling at your stupidity."

The carriage was once more silent, an embarrassed silence. Tang Thirty-Six said with extreme disdain, "Back in the Plum Garden Inn, I said to you that you and Xu Yourong were both people that made others speechless. Now it seems to me that the two of you are also models of how to bring disaster on yourselves."

Every time they talked about this, Tang Thirty-Six's very casual words would make Chen Changsheng speechless.

Since he had nothing to say about this matter, he could only change the subject. He very seriously asked, "Back then, I once asked Luoluo to help me investigate the elf girl from the Garden of Zhou. Now, since I know that it was a mistake, I want to write her a letter telling her this, but I also feel that it's very inappropriate. What do you think?"

Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and disdainfully said, "What do I think? If you didn't even think this inappropriate, then you really would be a pig."

"Then what should I do?"

"I'll write a letter to Princess Luoluo, and then you can mention it in the letter."

Tang Thirty-Six proposed his own idea.

Chen Changsheng thought about those whispers he heard outside the Prince's estate and still felt rather depressed. He asked, "Why won't she agree with me going to the Divine General's estate to propose?"

"Propose?" Tang Thirty-Six looked at him and asked, "And then?"

Chen Changsheng declared as if it was right and inevitable, "I go propose, and then she'll agree, and then won't these rumors and gossip come to an end?"

Tang Thirty-Six questioned, "For what reason do you believe she will agree to marry you?"

Chen Changsheng froze, thinking, is there still any need to think?

"If you go to the Divine General of the East's estate to propose, Xu Shiji will agree? Or are you saying you count on Xu Yourong herself to persist?" Tang Thirty-Six angrily said. "Back then, you were crying and calling to annul the engagement, and now you want her to cry and call to marry you? Why don't you think of just how shameless it will be if she does this?"

Chen Changsheng truly had not thought of this question. Now that he did, he truly did find it reasonable.

"Then...what should I do?"

"All these comments and jeers like dancing snowflakes—you have to bear them, endure them, until she thinks it's enough and begins to sympathize with you."

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Because of the matter of the confluence of the north and south, and also because of those rumors spreading around the capital, it grew increasingly difficult for Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong to meet.

He was gazing at the snowy sky, somewhat in a daze as he wondered when these days would come to a close, when he received a letter with no name.

This letter was not Su Li's, but Xu Yourong's. As he stood by the snowy lake across from the newly rebuilt academy wall and finished reading the letter, the corners of his lips perked up, revealing a smile that came from his heart. He then went to the library and, under the surprised gazes of the students, took up a brush and quickly composed a letter.

This letter was not a reply, but a letter to the Pope.

This letter said that in order to prepare for next year's Boiling Stone Summit, he wanted to stabilize his cultivation. In order to tamp down the foundation for Star Condensation, he wished to enter the Mausoleum of Books once more to view the monoliths and comprehend the Dao.

On the night of the very same day, he received the Pope's reply. In the letter, the Pope praised and was delighted at his eagerness to study, wishing him well on his re-entering the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths and comprehend the Dao. Finally, the Pope wrote that if, in the future, he wanted to enter the

Mausoleum of Books, he only needed to record it in the Li Palace. There was no need to especially write a letter to the Pope.

Reading the words on this letter, Chen Changsheng finally felt a real sort of change.

The Mausoleum of Books was not a place one could enter just by wanting to. In order to obtain the qualifications to enter the Mausoleum of Books, the cultivators of the continent had two options. They could engage in bloody battle with the demons up north in order to slowly accumulate military merit, or they could strive for a high rank in the Grand Examination so that they might enter the three banners, but ultimately, very few people were able to obtain this qualification.

To the current him, the Mausoleum of Books was a place that he could enter whenever he wanted.

He was no longer the young Daoist boy from Xining Village.

He was the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, the martial nephew of the Pope, the future Pope.

He was still very young, but he was already an important figure.

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The heavy stone doors slowly opened, causing the ground to shake.

Upon seeing that the mountain mausoleum before him was still green in the deep winter, Chen Changsheng very naturally recalled that time a year ago when the ground had begun to shake here.

When those priests and cavalry guarding the Mausoleum of Books saw the youth standing in front of several cardinals, they guessed at his identity and couldn't but have rather complex feelings towards him.

Chen Changsheng walked into the Mausoleum of Books, this time not as a tourist, nor as a monolith viewer, but more like an inspector.

Because of the respectful attitude displayed by those cardinals at his side, this feeling seemed all the more real.

He declined the residence that the Li Palace had prepared for him and went straight to the grass hut left behind by Xun Mei.

The grass hut had been uninhabited for a long time, the edge of the pot rather dusty. The dried meat suspended from the beam had not been completely eaten. On the other hand, the fence in the yard was much firmer than before, but he didn't know whether it was Tang Thirty-Six or Guan Feibai that had fixed it.



As he thought of those days of making meals, watching the sun, and viewing the monoliths, he began to feel a little longing. He could see Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu every day at the Orthodox Academy, but it had already been a year since he last saw Gou Hanshi and the others, and he didn't know how they were getting on in Mount Li.

A voice came from beyond the fence. Perhaps because the wintersweet in the forest was just beginning to bloom, it carried a clear and cold aroma.

"This is Senior Xun Mei's residence?"

Chen Changsheng awoke from his recollections and turned around, seeing Xu Yourong standing beyond the fence.

In the forest beyond the fence, the wintersweet was blooming. Standing there with the morning light spilling over her, she seemed as beautiful as a flower.

Chen Changsheng could currently enter the Mausoleum of Books whenever he wished. As the Holy Maiden, she naturally could as well.

He said, "Yes, at the time, we stayed here for a very long time."

Xu Yourong walked past the fence. Examining the rather dilapidated grass hut in the morning light, she calmly said, "There are times when I find myself very curious: at the time, you and my

senior brothers from the Mount Li Sword Sect were like fire and water, but you had to live under the same roof. Could it be that you didn't fight every night?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Gou Hanshi is a modest and cautious gentleman."

Xu Yourong replied, "But Senior Brother definitely doesn't have as good a temper."

Chen Changsheng thought about their first night when Tang Thirty-Six and Guan Feibai fought for a clean set of bedding and almost came to blows, and he began to smile.

"The Grand Examination doesn't begin until tomorrow. The Mausoleum of Books should still be very quiet."

He looked at Xu Yourong and praised, "This truly was a good idea."

The capital was abuzz with those rumors. Although they were mainly poking fun at Chen Changsheng, they still represented some complications to Xu Yourong.

It was rather difficult for the two to meet, and to quietly talk together was even more difficult. Her writing a letter inviting him to the Mausoleum of Books was truly a fantastic idea.

Of course, to use the Mausoleum of Books that the cultivators of

the world had to struggle and strive to enter as a place for a date was truly rather preposterous.

It was also only something she and he could do.

Seeing that he had understood her meaning and had even said it out loud, Xu Yourong felt somewhat ashamed, but not angry.

Because when Chen Changsheng said these words, his eyes were very clean, his expression very sincere.

He burned with passion, but when he was calm, his eyes were bright, but did not burn others.

One could call Qiushan Jun a sun, giving off warmth and heat, open and honest to the extreme.

Chen Changsheng was a refreshing breeze.

Everyone loved the sun.

But she loved more the refreshing breeze that curled around her as she took a casual stroll.

The capital in the deep winter was ten thousand li of silver, but the Mausoleum of Books was still verdant and lush.

As they walked into the forest of the mausoleum, what confronted them was the spring wind, delightfully refreshing to the extreme.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong walked along the mountain path, heading in the direction of the Reflecting Monolith hut.

A middle-aged man appeared in the middle of the mountain path, blocking them from moving forward.

This person's eyes were deep and serene and his cultivation level was clearly extremely high. As he stared at Chen Changsheng, his eyes contained a limitless cold. If one carefully looked, one could even see a little hatred.

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# Chapter 549 - Continuing Matters Of The Past In Front Of The Broken Monolith

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Ji Jin, from Scholartree Manor of the south. After swearing a blood oath and becoming a Monolith Guardian, he could not leave the Mausoleum of Books for the rest of his life.

Last year, this person attempted to help the Scholartree Manor student Zhong Hui to view the monoliths and comprehend the Dao so that he could surpass Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi. He had issued many biting jeers and criticisms towards Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi's method of comprehending the monoliths, but Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi ultimately used facts to shame him into silence.

Ji Jin stared at Chen Changsheng, his eyes containing hostility and hatred.

Although the Monolith Guardians could never leave the Mausoleum of Books, they weren't cut off from the world. Bit by bit, news from outside the Mausoleum of Books had also made its way into his ears.

Chen Changsheng took a single day to view the entire front mausoleum; he had become the youngest Principal of the Orthodox Academy; he had gone to the Garden of Zhou; he might have died but then turned out to have survived; he journeyed together with Su Li back south; he traveled one thousand li on the path of the sword in a single day and surpassed cultivation levels to defeat Star Condensation cultivators, and even defeated the pride of the generation, Xu Yourong; he had finally been confirmed as

successor to the Orthodoxy...

Zhong Hui, the student of Scholartree Manor that he had placed his hopes on, had obtained third rank on the first banner of last year's Grand Examination, beneath Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi. In the brief span of a year, Zhong Hui had achieved enormous progress and shocked the entire south, but how could he be compared to Chen Changsheng?

Crucially, this place was the Mausoleum of Books, the Mausoleum of Books that he had been willing to offer his life and freedom for so that he could remain!

For what reason can you just casually walk in!

Xu Yourong did not recognize Ji Jin, but she could perceive that this Monolith Guardian with unfathomable cultivation was clearly hostile towards Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng seemed to understand where Ji Jin's anger came from. He slightly bowed his body, not saying anything.

Based on principle, it was Ji Jin that should have bowed to him, but he felt that given Ji Jin's age and his life spent here, he should greet first.

But Ji Jin seemed to have no intention of greeting him, only staring.

Xu Yourong was very calm, her eyes gazing at Ji Jin gradually growing brighter.

Chen Changsheng shook his head and led her to the other side of the mountain path to walk past.

The two hands extending from Ji Jin's sleeves were trembling, and when Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong brushed past his body as they walked past, their veins were even showing.

In the end, he did nothing, because he did not dare.

He had lived these last few years in depression and wished deeply to vent his feelings. Chen Changsheng was naturally the best target.

But even though he was in the Mausoleum of Books, his family and Scholartree Manor still remained outside of it.

If he did not wish for his family and Scholartree Manor to be burned to ash by the Orthodoxy's fury, he could do nothing.

He did not need to bow to Chen Changsheng, but he could not move against him.

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The sun gradually rose but the clouds had already dispersed. The capital in winter had a different feeling, imbued with a sort of broad and open beauty.

Standing amidst the trees of the mausoleum and gazing at the distant streets of the capital, Chen Changsheng thought of how he used to sit on the great banyan tree in the Orthodox Academy and gaze at the streets with Luoluo. He said, "I once had Luoluo help me investigate any information on you. Since...I've found you, I feel I should tell this matter to her, so I mentioned it in a letter I wrote to her."

Xu Yourong softly replied, "When I was at Mount Li, I had thought you were dead, so I told Senior Brother of the events in the Garden of Zhou. Senior Brother was somewhat worried about me. A few days ago, after eating beef ribs, I wrote a letter to him."

After meeting that day on the Bridge of Helplessness and then eating beef ribs together, they had confirmed some things and should now clear some things up—this was a very responsible attitude. Even though he and she had no experience in this aspect, nor had they thought about them specifically, they still did it.

Their mentioning of these two letters was naturally their own way of displaying their intentions.

From the Garden of Zhou to now, he and she had displayed their intentions to each other many times, but they had always used rather special methods, like brushing away snow, like touching



shoulders, like writing letters to other people.

Chen Changsheng's eyes were very clear, like a small stream, so it was easy to see the happiness that swam through his eyes like fish.

Xu Yourong whispered, "I had you come to the Mausoleum of Books, not because...because of a serious matter."

The words were not complete—the 'not because' in this sentence should really have been 'not merely because'.

To meet in the Mausoleum of Books, what serious matter could there be? Naturally, it had to do with the Mausoleum of Books.

Behind them was the monolith hut of the Reflecting Monolith. On the surface of the black monolith, the poem was exceptionally vivid, but those remaining lines were still nigh incomprehensible.

Chen Changsheng approached the monolith and, recalling the time last year he spent viewing this monolith, felt somewhat emotional.

"At the time, I was cooking rice in the grass hut while watching the light fall upon the fence..."

Without excluding anything, he explained what he had experienced as he viewed the monoliths and comprehended the Dao as well as the various methods he had used.

Xu Yourong quietly listened, her two hands behind her constantly shaking in the refreshing breeze. It was like she was moving the Fated Star Plate, performing calculations according to his words.

After Chen Changsheng finished, she began to explain her experience and gains from the first time she viewed the Reflecting Monolith, "...so in essence, the shades are also fluctuations in the rays of light."

Chen Changsheng was somewhat unsure, replying, "The ink of the rubbings have their own varying shades—might not some meaning be lost?"

Xu Yourong replied, "The Heavenly Tome rubbings kept in South Stream Temple were made by the first Holy Maiden by using the will of the heavens to imprint on her soul and then placing this imprint on new monoliths. At least twenty to thirty percent of the true meaning is retained."

Upon hearing these words, Chen Changsheng could not help but feel a limitless reverence to the Holy Maiden that founded the southern faction of the Orthodoxy.

To only preserve twenty to thirty percent of the true meaning sounded like a rather poor example, but it must be known that the true meaning here was the true meaning of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. The first Holy Maiden had actually been able to take this true meaning, imprint it on her soul, and then once more lay

out those lines. This really could be regarded as a divine ability.

This sort of rubbing of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths was naturally completely different from those rubbings sold at the stalls in front of the Plum Garden Inn.

"Moreover, I wasn't speaking of rubbings just now. The shades I was speaking of are the shades of the brush strokes on the Heavenly Tome Monoliths," Xu Yourong explained.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat slow to come around. He asked, "You came to the Mausoleum of Books to view the monoliths before?"

Xu Yourong said somewhat embarrassedly, "When I was five, I was dragged here by the Empress."

Chen Changsheng fell silent, thinking, truly a person that makes others speechless.

After they finished viewing the Reflecting Monolith, they moved on to the next Heavenly Tome Monolith. They would occasionally see a few monolith viewers, but there were not many, and those people had stayed many years within the Mausoleum of Books. Their Dao hearts had long been still and all their focus was placed upon the monoliths. Thus, the pair's arrival was not noticed.

The two casually strolled within the mausoleum, discussing their first experiences viewing the monoliths and their enlightenments.

Now that they compared notes, they benefitted even more.

When they arrived before the broken monolith, the winter sun had already reached its zenith.

There was no one in front of this monolith hut. Chen Changsheng walked into the monolith hut and gazed at the shorn monolith base in silence.

Xu Yourong walked by his side and shook her head at him. Softly, but firmly, she said, "Don't."

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# Chapter 550 - Cultivating Together

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What shouldn't he do? Chen Changsheng naturally understood. After a moment of silence, he nodded his head.

This broken monolith had been broken by Zhou Dufu. The Heavenly Tome Monolith that had originally stood in this place had been brought away by him and should be installed in the Garden of Zhou. This also meant that this Heavenly Tome Monolith was highly likely to be with him and Xu Yourong. Just a moment ago when he saw the broken monolith, he was overcome by a fierce desire to see the complete appearance of this Heavenly Tome Monolith.

He wished to see which stone pearl was this Heavenly Tome Monolith and then reinstall it...

Xu Yourong did not allow him to do this because she was keenly aware that if the Heavenly Tome Monolith returned to its old mausoleum, it would definitely cause the heavens to change in color and cause all experts of the world to sense it.

"In total, eleven Heavenly Tome Monoliths are stranded outside."

He gazed at the peak of the Mausoleum of Books and whispered, "If the front mausoleum uses this broken monolith as the divider, then doesn't that mean there are twelve mausoleums in all?"

The Mausoleum of Books was a very mystical place.

Its peak seemed very close, but it was also so distant that it seemed to touch the sky.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong knew that before Zhou Dufu stole away those Heavenly Tome Monoliths, there was no such thing as a front mausoleum in the Mausoleum of Books.

Xu Yourong suggested, "We can ask someone about these things."

Chen Changsheng showed surprise as he asked, "Ask who?"

"I asked the Empress, but she wasn't willing to say."

Xu Yourong gazed at a certain place in the Mausoleum of Books and continued, "But there must be other people that know."

Chen Changsheng asked, "When do we begin?"

Xu Yourong rolled up her dress and sat cross-legged in front of the monolith hut. Then, she extended her hand and invited him to sit on the grass to her right.

Separated by several feet from the broken monolith, her slender finger began to write upon it. She wrote like the wind, stroke after stroke appearing on its surface.

She wrote very quickly, but there was no gap in her writing. It

was very clear, just like that sword she had wielded to break through the snowstorm on the Bridge of Helplessness.

Even a Saint that had stepped into the Divine Domain might only be able to understand ten to twenty percent of the words left by her finger. Not even they would be able to understand the entire thing.

The only person that could understand this writing was Chen Changsheng who sat by her in the grass.

Once she finished writing, it was Chen Changsheng's turn. Chen Changsheng's finger was extremely stable. Every stroke was like the peeling of a knife or the chiseling of a hatchet.

As the finger pierced the air, it carried along a breeze. Once the breeze vanished, it naturally left no traces behind. As for the broken monolith, it was even less possible to leave anything upon it.

But Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong stared at the broken monolith with incredible focus.

Because they had completely memorized those words they had just written.

Those strokes were words and also pictures.

It was divided into three sections, one hundred and eight moves.

Put together, it was the Halving Blade Style.

Back in the Garden of Zhou, when that massive mountain of the obsidian coffin had opened, they discovered on its wall the world's most famous and most powerful blade style.

The Halving Blade Style left behind by Zhou Dufu was truly mystical. The one hundred and eight moves all seemed to be individual blade techniques, but in reality, they were one. Only by completely grasping each of the hundred and eight moves could one truly understand the true meaning of the Halving Blade Style.

At the time, Nanke was bringing the monster tide to attack them, so they simply did not have any time. They were forced to memorize it from different ends. Xu Yourong memorized it starting from the front, memorizing thirty-seven techniques in all. Chen Changsheng memorized starting from the back, remembering sixty-nine techniques. Then, just as they met shoulder-to-shoulder and smiled at each other, the Halving Blade Style vanished without a trace from the coffin wall!

What did this mean? It meant that only the two of them could let the Halving Blade Style reappear in the world.

After leaving the Garden of Zhou, the two of them had separately attempted to copy down these blade techniques, but to their shock, they discovered that the method Zhou Dufu had used to inscribe these blade techniques on the coffin actually seemed to contain some of the wonder of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. With their current cultivation levels, it was simply impossible for them to take those lines in their seas of consciousness and put them to



paper.

And what did this mean? It meant that only when the two of them were together would they be able to practice the Halving Blade Style.

Back in the Mausoleum of Zhou, Chen Changsheng had once said, "Let's practice it together."

Now it seemed that these words were truly an incomparably precise prediction.

After so long, they were finally able to reunite, finally able to have a chance to learn this blade style together.

The broken monolith under the hut had once been severed by Zhou Dufu using his Halving Blade. Even after several hundred, even several thousand, years of wind and rain, it still retained some blade intent.

Before the broken monolith, the peerless and divine work that was the Halving Blade Style reappeared. To comprehend and then practice, there was nothing more perfect than this.

The serious matter they had entered the Mausoleum of Books for was naturally this.

Time slowly flowed by, the winter sun slowly moved.

Silence reigned in front of the broken monolith.

With the aid of a high platform, a sky partitioned off by a sky well, and the limpid waters of a canal, several gazes fell upon this place.

This young couple, shoulder to shoulder, quietly sat amongst the grass.

Anyone could see that they were talking of love.

Who could imagine that they were learning the blade, cultivating the Dao?

Of course, learning the blade and cultivating the Dao could also be their way of talking of love.

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Ten Heavenly Tome Monoliths, the secret of the Garden of Zhou, the confrontation between factions—there were simply far too many reasons for Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong to be cautious and worried about each other.

Let alone the fact that they loved each other, in the long river of

history, things like father going against son and husband falling out with wife had happened far too many times. The people involved were all truly powerful figures, possessing insight that could peer beyond the secular world. Ultimately, however, they still sank into the quagmire of harming each other. Why? Because the benefits were so great that they surpassed the scope of the secular world.

Fortunately, the ten Heavenly Tome Monoliths, the secret of the Garden of Zhou, and the peerless and divine work that could only be cultivated together made it so that there were so many identical or different reasons that it seemed foreordained for them to be inseparable for the rest of their lives.

Viewing the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, joining together the Halving Blade, studying the Scroll of Time, and pondering how to break the array left behind by Wang Zhice caused time to flow by very quickly. The date in the Mausoleum of Books came to an end. The pair had developed an even deeper understanding of the Heavenly Tomes and had finally converted the Halving Blade into actual knowledge. Although they had not been able to completely grasp the Scroll of Time, they had a very wonderful time.

They departed from the broken monolith, but they did not directly exit the mausoleum. Instead, they followed the path around the Mausoleum of Books and walked towards the canal on the south face of the mausoleum.

The clear and shallow canals of water ran through the stone plain, forming an extremely complex pattern, but on the mountain above was a path simple to the extreme. The mountain path was

extremely straight, extending from the foot of the mountain straight to its very peak, the steps made of white stone. This was the legendary Divine Path.

Chen Changsheng was no stranger to this scene. On the first day he entered the Mausoleum of Books, he had come to this place.

On that very same night, he and his companions watched as Xun Mei awoke from his dream of the Mausoleum of Books and came to this place. He crossed through these canals, dashing to pieces the stars within the water, and reached that pavilion. He wished to take this Divine Path to reach the summit of the Mausoleum of Books. Then Xun Mei collapsed into his bosom.

Xun Mei's absolute resolve to walk upon the Divine Path had left on him and Gou Hanshi and the rest an almost unforgettable impression, even more important than the notebook that he had also left behind. As he gazed at the ramrod-straight Divine Path and that peak at its end that seemed so distant as to touch the sky, Chen Changsheng silently thought, there will be a day when I will also walk from here to there.

If one wanted to walk upon the Divine Path, one needed to pass that pavilion. Under the pavilion was a person, his body covered in heavy and old-fashioned armor. Even his face and hands were covered in rust-coated metal. He seemed just like a statue, but there was no aura of death about him, only a feeling of an ancient being that had experienced countless things.

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# Chapter 551 - Speaking Of The Past In The Thirteen Mausoleums

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A few days ago, Xu Yourong had said that if one wanted to know the circumstances of the Mausoleum of Books, they could ask someone. Even if the Divine Empress was not willing to say, there was definitely someone else that knew. Since it involved the Mausoleum of Books, who could know more than this man before them? This man had already sat guard within the Mausoleum of Books for several centuries.

She and Chen Changsheng crossed over the limpid canals. Arriving in front of the pavilion, they bowed to the person underneath.

There were already very few people in the world that necessitated her and Chen Changsheng to bow at the same time, but in the end, the person under the pavilion was quite unique.

The number one Divine General of the continent, Han Qing. His seniority was extremely high, his age extremely old, and his cultivation extremely profound. Many years ago, he was already infinitely close to the Divine Domain, and on the battlefield, he was unmatched, the sole person currently in the world that could be discussed on equal terms with those legendary Divine Generals of the past. The likes of Xu Shiji and Xue He were not even worthy of being compared and not even the Storms of the Eight Directions dared say that they could win easily against him.

What made people revere him and emotionally sigh the most was that this general had guarded the Mausoleum of Books for several

hundred years and had never once left. It seemed he was going to sit there until his life came to an end.

"Greetings to Sir, I am Xu Yourong. Under the orders of my teacher, I have come before Senior to ask for Senior's guidance on a few questions."

Xu Yourong softly said as she gazed at the man in the armor.

Because his eyes were obscured, it was impossible to be sure if the man within the armor had opened his eyes or not, but Chen Changsheng could clearly see that some of the dust in the cracks in the armor had suddenly flown out, dancing under the sunlight like countless tiny moths. At the same time, he sensed a gaze like a metal spear falling upon his and Xu Yourong's body.

"Who is your teacher?"

An elderly voice emerged from the depths of the armor. It seemed speckled with rust and weathered by the trials of time.

Xu Yourong replied, "I come from South Stream Temple."

South Stream Temple was divided into an outer sect and inner sect, but only the current Holy Maiden or her direct successor could travel the world under the name of South Stream Temple.

The rays of the winter sun fell upon the armor, but rather than making it warmer, it seemed to make it even more chilly, just like

the voice coming from the armor.

"Why does she not come herself?"

"My teacher said, at the time, Senior could not answer her question, and now Senior would similarly be unable to answer her questions, so she left the opportunity to me."

"Then ask away."

"In the Mausoleum of Books, just how many of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths were stolen away?"

Xu Yourong's gaze, calm and warm, saw through the flying dust and rays of winter light and fell upon the Divine General's armor.

But her question was direct and piercingly cold, like the Divine Path on the south face of the Mausoleum of Books, directly piercing towards the heavens.

Chen Changsheng glanced at her, thinking, Divine General Han Qing has guarded the Mausoleum of Books for several centuries, and what he guards is its Divine Path and its secrets. That there are many Heavenly Tome Monoliths no longer in the Mausoleum of Books but lost in the outside worlds is definitely one of the Mausoleum of Books' greatest secrets; how could he respond to your question?

Surprisingly, in the next moment, the old and chilly voice rang



out from the armor.

"Twelve monoliths."

Chen Changsheng was rather shocked at this answer, first because Divine General Han Qing had actually answered the question, second because of the answer itself.

He and Xu Yourong glanced at each other and saw the astonishment in each other's eyes—there were twelve monoliths lost outside?

"All of them were taken away by that person?" Xu Yourong asked the man under the pavilion.

"Eleven monoliths."

"Then what of the other one?"

"Emperor Taizu removed it."

Hearing this, Chen Changsheng remembered the notebook Wang Zhice had hidden in Lingyan Pavilion.

In the notebook, Wang Zhice had once mentioned that in his later years, when Taizu was imprisoned in the palace, Emperor Taizu enjoyed indulging in women and music. In the end, he had given Wang Zhice a certain item...

"Zhou Dufu took away the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, resulting in the front mausoleum coming into use?"

"Correct, thus the present Mausoleum of Books is actually thirteen mausoleums."

One broken monolith served as a boundary marker, twelve monoliths naturally became thirteen mausoleums; this was no particularly challenging math problem.

"Those Heavenly Tome Monoliths...where are they now?"

Xu Yourong finally asked the most important question.

Before coming to this pavilion, she and Chen Changsheng both believed that all the Heavenly Tome Monoliths were in their hands, but now they realized that this was certainly not the case.

"Where that person took those Heavenly Tome Monoliths he stole away, nobody knows."

Upon hearing the voice from the armor, Chen Changsheng lowered his head in silence, thinking, I actually do know.

"But one Heavenly Tome Monolith...is probably in the hands of the Demon Lord."

At this statement, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong were finally stunned.

The mountain mausoleum was deathly still. The limpid waters slowly flowing through the canal also did not make much noise.

"For what reason did they steal away so many Heavenly Tome Monoliths?"

"First of all, this already surpasses the scope of what I promised to South Stream Temple. Secondly, if I knew, why would I have sat here for so many centuries?"

After these words, no more sound issued forth.

The winter winds howled through and outside the pavilion, carrying along the dust on the armor and sending into disarray the cold and clear light. The Divine General seemed to once more transform into a sculpture.

They left the pavilion and returned to Xun Mei's little yard. There, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong silently gazed at those plum blossoms beyond the fence for a few moments.

"At the very beginning, the Mausoleum of Zhou was surrounded by eleven Heavenly Tome Monoliths in total. If the Heavenly Tome Monolith Wang Zhice obtained from Emperor Taizu was not originally part of these eleven, then this also means that our initial guess was wrong. The person that entered the Garden of Zhou and

took away that Heavenly Tome Monolith, forcing Zhou Dufu to use ten thousand swords to suppress the rest, was not Wang Zhice, but the Demon Lord."

"That Heavenly Tome Monolith still remains in the Demon Lord's hands while the other eleven are with us."

Xu Yourong turned around to look at him, saying quietly, "There's no need to worry too much."

Besides Chen Changsheng, she was the only person in the world that had seen those ten Heavenly Tome Monoliths surrounding the Mausoleum of Zhou as well as the black stone that Chen Changsheng had taken out of his sheath. Since the Garden of Zhou had reopened, Chen Changsheng should have had eleven Heavenly Tome Monoliths, but on that night when he came to her window, he had only taken out ten.

Xu Yourong had never asked the whereabouts of the other Heavenly Tome Monolith. She could roughly guess, and even if she went by Chen Changsheng's method of splitting evenly, there should only have been ten monoliths between them in the first place. The black stone that Emperor Taizu had secretly given to Wang Zhice which then ended up in Chen Changsheng's hands had originally been brought into the Garden of Zhou by him and was his own property.

"I am never worried that a world that I don't even have the strength to enter yet might cause me to lose my way."

Chen Changsheng looked at her and continued, "I'm only worried that because of me, you might bear a pressure that you don't need to bear."

They had never talked about this problem before.

Xu Yourong was the present Holy Maiden. Ever since she was a child, she was viewed as the future leader of the human world. From the moment she was born, she began to grow accustomed to living a life of responsibility.

Back in the Plains of the Unsetting Sun in that snowy temple, she had once said to him that this sort of life truly was rather tiresome, but she was already used to it. The reappearance of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths was a very important matter to the human world and might even affect the balance of strength between the humans and demons. Given her Dao heart that cherished the world, if this matter had not been related to Chen Changsheng, she would probably have long since announced this fact to the world and then placed those Heavenly Tome Monoliths back into the Mausoleum of Books.

Only on that snowy night when Chen Changsheng handed those five pearls over to her did he finally think of this question.

He did not want her to bear this sort of pressure.

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## Chapter 552 - Life Is Difficult To Bear...

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"I will learn how to grow accustomed to treating these stone pearls as beautiful pieces of jewelry and not Heavenly Tome Monoliths."

Xu Yourong looked at Chen Changsheng and calmly continued, "And now, I'm somewhat hungry."

No one had lived in Xun Mei's grass hut for a long time, so it was covered in dust, but all sorts of tools and utensils were still at the ready.

Chen Changsheng picked two cabbages and a dozen or so peppers from the garden, covered a few slices of dried meat in honey, and steamed them. Adding on some white rice, he cooked a fragrant meal.

Xu Yourong ate very contentedly, but also with some embarrassment.

Afterwards, they discussed the next Grand Examination and next year's Boiling Stone Summit, as well as how they would leave the Mausoleum of Books.

In order to avoid being seen by others and prevent anybody from guessing, thus allowing the capital to continue to buzz with rumors, the two agreed to leave separately. Xu Yourong would leave first while Chen Changsheng would stay in the Mausoleum of Books for another day. However, they failed to understand that

attempting to hide it only made it more conspicuous and that this would utterly fail to conceal their relationship from others.

One might even consider it as deceiving themselves.

Yet before Xu Yourong could leave, the small yard received an uninvited visitor.

The visitor was the Monolith Guardian from Scholartree Manor, Ji Jin. Perhaps it was because he had recognized Xu Yourong's identity or had guessed at something, but he stood on the other side of the fence, his expression rather desolate and his face rather pale. The hatred and unwillingness in his eyes were no more, replaced with complex and indescribable emotions.

Chen Changsheng was prepared to speak when Xu Yourong indicated that he should hold.

Her sleeves fluttering, she walked to the fence. Gazing at Ji Jin, she indifferently said, "I will propose to cancel your qualifications to be Monolith Guardian and have you expelled from the Mausoleum of Books."

Sunlight leaked through the branches of the plum and orange trees and fell upon her face.

This sublimely beautiful face was instantly suffused with a divine and august majesty.



Because as she spoke, she was the Holy Maiden of the south that reigned above.

To become a Monolith Guardian of the Mausoleum of Books was an incredibly difficult task. One needed to swear an incredibly extreme blood oath that seemed to contain some of the power of the Heavenly Dao.

Once one swore the blood oath and became a Monolith Guardian, one would possess the lifelong dream of cultivators, the freedom to interact with the Heavenly Tome Monoliths at any time of day. Simultaneously, they would also lose the freedom to leave the Mausoleum of Books. For the rest of their lives, they could only research and study the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, forbidden from taking one step outside the Mausoleum of Books.

From the time the Orthodoxy established this rule to now, countless years had passed, but this rule had only been broken once—that was the time when Su Li invaded the Mausoleum of Books and poured a torrent of abuse on those two Monolith Guardians that had come from the Mount Li Sword Sect, then forcefully brought them back to Mount Li.

Those two Monolith Guardians later on became the two elders of Mount Li's Discipline Hall and were also one of the principal causes of Mount Li's internal strife.

The allure of the Mausoleum of Books to cultivators was far too powerful, just like a dream that was impossible to end.

The more profound one's insights into the Dao, the more one researched the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, the less one was willing to leave.

Even a great Daoist possessing such extraordinary talent as Xun Mei took several decades to wake up.

To cancel out the blood oath of a Monolith Guardian and expel him from the Mausoleum of Books was something only the Pope and the Holy Maiden were qualified to do, and this Monolith Guardian would suffer the backlash of the blood oath and suffer extreme pains.

Upon hearing Xu Yourong's words and seeing Ji Jin's face instantly pale and body incessantly shudder, Chen Changsheng became vigilant.

In his view, for Ji Jin to be humiliated in this way, to receive so harsh a punishment, he would be so furious that he might even go mad and attack Xu Yourong.

But Ji Jin did not angrily lash out. After a moment, he gradually calmed. Separated from Xu Yourong by the fence, he bowed.

He clasped his hands and raised them up, seeming exceptionally reverential.

His voice trembled, clearly very excited and also somewhat disappointed.

"Many thanks for the Holy Maiden's pity. Ji Jin is endlessly grateful—only with death can I repay."

As he watched Ji Jin's figure gradually vanish into the forest, Chen Changsheng felt rather confused.

"Why?"

"Because he wanted to leave."

"I hear...that the backlash of the blood oath is incredibly frightening."

"In the end, it's not as frightening as having no freedom."

"But didn't they become Monolith Guardians of their own will?"

"As time goes by, the thoughts of people often change in ways that they would never have imagined at the very beginning."

Xu Yourong walked to his side, saying, "To many cultivators, the Mausoleum of Books is the most beautiful dream and also the longest imprisonment."

Chen Changsheng remembered that he had once heard similar words.

She continued, "In fact, I've long held this opinion. I intend to convince the martial aunts back in the temple and then discuss with the Li Palace to remove this rule."

Chen Changsheng gazed at her incomparably elegant and beautiful face and found it increasingly beautiful. He spoke from his heart, "You are a good person."

Then he added, "If the Li Palace does not accept South Stream Temple's request, then wait for me to become Pope, and I will endeavor to remove this rule."

Xu Yourong quietly replied, "You are also a good person."

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On the next day, Chen Changsheng exited the Mausoleum of Books. Under the escort of several cardinals, he returned to the Orthodox Academy.

At this time, it was very early, the morning light was barely warm and the sky in the west was still as dark as the night. He was just preparing to go to the newly repaired kitchen by the lake to find Xuanyuan Po and get something to eat, but he suddenly realized that there was a person on the great banyan tree that he never expected to see. Unable to hold back his surprise, he asked,

"What's wrong?"

Other than under extremely rare and special circumstances, Tang Thirty-Six would definitely not wake up so early, but now he was standing on the branches of the great banyan tree, staring off into the distance. Chen Changsheng didn't know whether he hadn't slept the entire night or something else. Tang Thirty-Six continued to stare into the distance, not turning to look at Chen Changsheng. With an indifferent expression, he asked, "Do you know what the most painful thing in the secular world is?"

Chen Changsheng shook his head.

Tang Thirty-Six sneered, "The most painful thing in the secular world is that when we're all working until we're tired as pigs and dogs, some people have the leisure to go on dates, and you even had a certain person keep a secret, pretty good...actually secretly meeting with your lover in the Mausoleum of Books."

After the Orthodox Academy recruited new students, the first examination these students would face was the Grand Examination. For the sake of the Grand Examination that was about to begin, Tang Thirty-Six and Su Moyu were busy to the extreme, and even Zhexiu would occasionally come to teach a lesson to these students, using pain and blood to tell them just what a true battle was.

Yet although Chen Changsheng was the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, he paid no mind to this matter.

The true source of Tang Thirty-Six's pain, though, was still the part about keeping a secret.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong had gotten to know each other in the Garden of Zhou, had mutual affection towards each other, and would often meet in private; in the entire capital, only he knew this secret.

With regards to secrets, once a secret was discovered, those people who knew of this secret would often greatly relax, just like Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong over these past few days.

But those who knew this secret, but could not speak of it to others, would bear their pain and pressure and even a little more than that.

The rumor had spread throughout the capital and everyone knew that Chen Changsheng was bitterly in love with Xu Yourong but that Xu Yourong refused. Tang Thirty-Six wanted nothing more than to sputter this secret over these people's faces, wanted nothing more than to reopen Clear Lake Restaurant and then stand on its roof and tell the populace this story, announce the pair's secret to the entire world.

But he could not act this way, so he was in terrible pain and even somewhat angry.

Chen Changsheng looked at him, somewhat confused. "Back then, you were the one that said I should bear it."

Tang Thirty-Six looked back at him and said, "But I'm almost at the point where I can't bear it anymore."

# Chapter 553 - Updates On Various Matters In The World

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The Grand Examination was about to begin.

It was still at the Li Palace.

A sea of people was still outside the Li Palace.

Each of the gambling markets had long since made their preparations. The storytellers used the finest [Maojian tea](#) to rinse their mouths.

(Maojian is a famous type of green tea, named after the shape of its tea leaves: "mao" (毛) means 'furry', which describes the fuzz that forms on the surface of the tea when brewed, and "jian" (尖) means 'sharp'.)

In the end, however, there were still a few places that were different. For example, the expressions and eyes of those people that had come to see the spectacle were not as passionate and excited as last year's. Many people were constantly yawning, and those tourists that had come from the outlying counties and provinces had clearly decreased when compared to last year.

The reason for this was that last year's Grand Examination was a great year, with many of the young geniuses on the upper ranks of the Proclamation of Azure Sky attending. Compared to last year, there was nothing exceptional about this year's Grand Examination, with barely anyone of note taking part. As for the



highly anticipated Xu Yourong, with her becoming Holy Maiden, any hope of her attending was lost.

In truth, at present, it was simply impossible for either Qiushan Jun or Xu Yourong to attend the Grand Examination. There had originally been no need for them to attend the Grand Examination to affirm themselves, and moreover, those people that were worthy of competing with them on the same level, such as Chen Changsheng, had already taken part last year.

Of course, Chen Changsheng had still come to the Li Palace, attracting the fervent cheers of the crowd. Naturally, these cheers were also accompanied by that commentary which had not slackened in the slightest over these past few days.

Could Little Principal Chen really be a descendant of the Imperial clan? Could he really be Crown Prince Zhaoming? Fine, this sort of theory was far too absurd. Then was he really attempting to rejoin the engagement? I hear that he stood outside the Holy Maiden's palace all night like a fool, is it true? Wasn't the snowfall that night very large?

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Tang Thirty-Six and Su Moyu brought the three new students that had managed to arduously pass the pre-examination to the testing site in the Li Palace.

On the other hand, Chen Changsheng, under the guidance of a cardinal, was led to that palace hall in the deepest parts of the Li Palace. It wasn't because he wasn't willing to take up the responsibility of principal. In truth, this first batch of new students of the Orthodox Academy was quite lacking in foundation. To pass the pre-examination was already a pleasant surprise, but it was simply impossible for there to be much hope of them succeeding in the Grand Examination. Adding on the fact that the Li Palace was essentially the Orthodox Academy's home court, Chen Changsheng was not concerned about encountering any of the problems from last year.

He had an even more important task.

As he watched a seemingly endless and limitless amount of water fall from the wooden ladle onto the Green Leaf, he was once more nagged by those questions of the past.

The Green Leaf World was the same as the Garden of Zhou. Since it could not grow larger, what need was there to assiduously tend to it, to have it incessantly grow healthy and strong?

The Pope placed down the wooden ladle and then took out a soft towel to wipe his hands. He indicated that Chen Changsheng should sit, then said, "There are some rules that perhaps really are too stale and require changing, but you must also understand that without rules, nothing can be accomplished. How can living under the starry sky not require veneration? For everyone to live their lives like Su Li is naturally joyous, but do not forget that although rules are like fetters to experts, to the weak, they are at times safeguards. We must place more consideration on how the world

operates and not merely consider our own points of view."

Previously, Chen Changsheng had brought the problems of the Black Dragon and the Monolith Guardians. For the latter, the Pope had produced a clear-cut response, but he did not even mention the former, making his stance on it exceptionally obvious.

"Martial Uncle, isn't it because your view of the world is different from the Divine Empress's that we currently have these problems?"

"You can believe this to be so."

"But..." Chen Changsheng still wished to fight on for a while.

The Pope raised his hand, indicating he no longer needed to speak. Gazing at him, he advised, "Even if you wish to put into practice your view of the world, there is no need to rush to do it all at once."

Chen Changsheng thought of the shadow that lay before him and thought, I am forced to be in a rush.

"Once you become Pope, you can do whatever you wish, and at the time, you will not need to come and ask me."

"Martial Uncle..."

"Upon hearing this, do you not deeply wish that I would be like Mei Lisha and die a little earlier?" the Pope smiled and said.

Chen Changsheng had simply no idea how to respond to this.

"Relax, you will not have to wait too long."

The Pope walked to the pot and used his handkerchief to very carefully wipe the beads of water off the Green Leaf.

Within the serene palace hall, Chen Changsheng did not receive a single bit of good news. Not long after leaving, however, he heard an unexpected piece of good news: the Grand Examination had formally concluded and glad tidings had come that two students of the Orthodox Academy had actually entered the three banners. Chu Wenbin, the transfer student from the Heavenly Dao Academy, had even managed to place seventeenth on the second banner.

On that night, the restaurants of Hundred Flowers Lane were brightly lit as the teachers and students of the Orthodox Academy happily celebrated.

As for who was this year's first rank of the first banner for the Grand Examination, besides those gambling addicts, no one really much cared.

The world was still primarily concerned with the confluence of the north and south. Not long after the Grand Examination

concluded, the two sides finally obtained a nigh perfect result from their negotiations. Next autumn, the confluence of the north and south would finally be signed and the sects and noble families of the south, possessing countless cultivating experts and riches, would finally be incorporated into the domain of the Great Zhou Dynasty. Although in many aspects, this was only a nominal incorporation, this was still a task that not even Emperor Taizong had managed to accomplish. For a moment, the entire continent proclaimed the Divine Empress's glory.

As for those hidden currents that many people were worried might appear, they were strictly controlled by the Imperial Court. The number of fingers cut off and the number of ghosts added in the principal alley of the Northern Military Department were uncountable. Zhou Tong and those officials loyal to the Tianhai Divine Empress had added on innumerable vile deeds to their record of achievements.

As for the most worrisome southward invasion of the demons, it also, fortunately, failed to come into reality. It was said that this year, the snowy plains of the demon realm were ravaged by blizzards. The Demon Imperial clan and the noble clans of Xuelao City had placed all their thoughts on providing relief for their own tribes and annexing others, having no spare attention to gaze south.

Just like the common people, Chen Changsheng was also very happy, because this meant that when the human world confronted the demons, they would be more unified, more powerful, and more difficult to defeat. This also meant that Xu Yourong's status would become even more transcendent. At the same time, it was said that the White Emperor couple would attend the signing ceremony, so

Luoluo should also be accompanying them, right?

The southern diplomatic missions gradually departed the capital. South Stream Temple's group was the last to leave, but they still had to leave.

To Xu Yourong, the capital was her hometown, but Holy Maiden Peak was the place where she would pass her many years of cultivation.

Wind and snow blew over the Bridge of Helplessness, almost like it had returned to that day.

"See you again at the Boiling Stone Summit."

"See you again."

On the snowy bridge, Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong wished each other well, and then said goodbye.

Holding the Yellow Paper Umbrella, he watched as her figure gradually faded into the wind and snow. He did not feel much sorrow over this parting.

The Boiling Stone Summit would be this summer and they would quickly reunite, and there would inevitably come a day in which he went to South Stream Temple.

On the contrary, his attitude became even calmer and more composed.

Not merely towards her, but also towards himself.

He firmly believed that he could defy the heavens and change fate, that he could live past twenty, and then past two hundred, and then year after year.

Because now, he was no longer alone. He wanted to live a long life together with her.

In the past, he only thought that he must live, but he had never thought, and naturally had never experienced, that living itself was a very beautiful thing.

Only that day on the Bridge of Helplessness when the white gauze fell and he saw her eyes did he finally understand.

From that day, he changed greatly. He was still calmly focused on survival, but he lived life much more naturally and spontaneously.

To put it another way, the current Chen Changsheng lived much more vibrantly, no longer the oppressive and even wooden self of the past.

This sort of change in his spiritual world also affected the efforts he made to survive.

He continued to read, study, meditate in cultivation. Although the five stone pearls on his wrist failed to emit even the slightest trace of Qi, they were far more useful than the most precious of crystals. He continued to practice the swords Su Li had taught him, as well as all the swords of the world, and he also did not forget to practice those one hundred and eight blades.

His cultivation continued to grow more and more stable, getting ever closer to the peak of Ethereal Opening. Every night, he would draw in the radiance of the stars, gradually accumulating it in the meridians and orifices of his body, waiting for the future day in which he would release a great light, and his future would inevitably be bright.

It had been almost two years since he had come to the capital.

It had been one year since he had entered the Lingyan Pavilion and read Wang Zhice's notebook.

He still had three years.

Over the course of this year, he had never once thought about defying the heavens and changing fate in accordance with the method outlined in Wang Zhice's notebook, even though he was now recognized by the entire world as the next Pope. Logically, this was his best opportunity, the best circumstances, to make the entire world dance and thus change the appearance of the sea of stars.



But he would not do this, because too many people would die.

He believed that he could reach the Saint Realm in three years, enter the Divine Domain, and attempt to reconnect his meridians.

This sounded like an inconceivable, unaccomplishable task, but since he had gone from being a young and ignorant Daoist from the countryside to the next Pope and an expert that could see the threshold of Star Condensation in the course of only two years, what couldn't he do?

The word 'impossible' had no meaning to him.

Because he was not allowed to think it impossible.

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As Chen Changsheng advanced, the entire world advanced as well.

Worthy of being called the generation of blooming flowers, after the generation of geniuses that included Wang Po, Xiao Zhang, Xun Mei, and Liang Wangsun, even more geniuses surged forth.

In the spring, the various proclamations issued by the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets were formally updated.

This time, the proclamations underwent massive changes.

First of all, the Tier of Legendary Weapons that had remained unaltered for so many years was finally changed.

The Frost God Spear was still ranked first.

The Halving Blade was still second.

The Wooden Sword Little Phoenix was ranked third.

The Heaven Shrouding Sword that had reappeared in the world was ranked fourth!

Everyone knew that this was because the wielder of the sword was too excessively powerful.

It was also a fact that no matter how strong the divine weapon, only in the hands of a powerful person could it display its true might.

Because that magical artifact of the Orthodoxy that had been lost and thus had its name scrawled out into gray, the Vault Sheath, had once again ascended the cultivation world's stage, the new ink seemed abnormally vivid. The sword called Stainless was ranked ninety-fifth, in front of the Six Protections Divine Armor but still far from the sixty-ninth ranked Dragonscale Sword, perhaps also

by the same reasoning for the Heaven Shrouding Sword.

The divine weapons and tools of the Tier of Legendary Weapons naturally attracted the notice of the crowd, but what people were truly concerned about was still people themselves.

Liberation, Golden Distinction, and Azure Sky—these three Proclamations had also been updated.

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## Chapter 554 - Vanished Names

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The new Proclamation of Azure Sky had nothing new about it. The most famous person on it was actually Xuanyuan Po. In the Elder of Heavenly Secrets' concise and comprehensive commentary, this bear youth's techniques were extremely compatible with his body and were given an incredibly high assessment. As for the other new names, the vast majority were young men and women of not even fifteen and not many people recognized their names.

On that night last year, Chen Changsheng had drawn down an entire sky of starlight in the Mausoleum of Books, allowing many people to easily pass that most difficult barrier that was the threshold of Ethereal Opening. That bitter and miserable scene that would occur three or four times out of ten in the past years did not occur. Those familiar names once on the Proclamation of Azure Sky had all been removed and gone to the Proclamation of Golden Distinction.

Tang Thirty-Six had left the Proclamation of Azure Sky, but he was unable to enter the Proclamation of Golden Distinction. With his current position at the upper level of Ethereal Opening, this was an almost unimaginable occurrence. Upon hearing this news, he remained silent in the Orthodox Academy for a very long time. Only when he heard that Zhexiu and Su Moyu had also failed to make the list did he grow happy again.

With Chen Changsheng's assistance, although Zhexiu's Tide Rush of Blood had not been cured, he had once more made a breakthrough in cultivation. Coupled with his innately powerful and fearsome fighting power, the only reason he was not able to

enter the Proclamation of Golden Distinction was that he had been too heavily injured in Zhou Prison and had not displayed his strength for a very long time.

Tang Thirty-Six and Su Moyu were unable to enter the proclamation only because the competition for this year's Proclamation of Golden Distinction was too fierce.

The demi-humans, who were scarcely visible on the Proclamation of Azure Sky, gave a full display of the particular characteristic of their race to explode in strength in the middle phase of their cultivation. They took up a full quarter of the rankings, and those three young demi-human experts ranked at the front were even rated by the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets as having a future chance of threatening the fifth-ranked demi-human expert on the Proclamation of Liberation, Xiao De.

The most shocking of all was Zhong Hui. This youth who had obtained third rank on the first banner in last year's Grand Examination had been cast into the gloom by the radiance of Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi, so much so that many people found it hard to remember his name. Who could have imagined that in this short span of a year, he had actually been able to break into the peak of Ethereal Opening! As a result, he seized fourth place on the Proclamation of Golden Distinction.

It was a pity that no matter how outstanding this Scholartree Manor student's performance was, it was still unable to completely suppress the dazzling radiance of a few certain individuals.

Gou Hanshi had viewed the monoliths in the Mausoleum of

Books for half a year. After returning to Mount Li, he engaged in a duel by a cold stream with an initial level Star Condensation expert belonging to Xiao Songgong's faction and easily won.

This battle alone sufficed to have the Elder of Heavenly Secrets personally place him on the third rank of the Proclamation of Golden Distinction.

There was no second, because the first rank was shared by two people.

Upon seeing those two names, whether it was the denizens of the capital or the female disciples of South Stream Temple's outer sect, all were filled with emotion and shook their heads in silence.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

Whether or not that marriage contract had really been rendered invalid, it seemed that these two names would appear together until the end of time.

Many people thought that this was not predestination, but the entanglements of fate, not anything good to talk about.

Then what of the name that had always been tied to Xu Yourong's in the past?

Qiushan Jun had already successfully broken into Star Condensation, so he naturally could not remain on the

Proclamation of Golden Distinction. He ceded the first rank to Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

But what stunned the entire continent was that his name was not to be found on the Proclamation of Liberation.

Qiushan Jun was too young, so it was only natural that he could not be put on the same level as those experts on the Proclamation of Liberation's upper ranks. Nobody believed that he could challenge powerful figures like Wang Po and Xiao Zhang, but given his current level of strength, he should still have been able to enter the tail end of the Proclamation of Liberation.

If he were truly able to enter the Proclamation of Liberation, even at its bottom-most rank, he would still be the youngest expert on the Proclamation of Liberation in the past one hundred years.

The entire continent had anticipated the arrival of this day, but all their hopes had come to naught.

The explanation the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had for this was that because of the opening of the Garden of Zhou and the following demon conspiracy, and then adding on the self-stabbing during the internal strife of Mount Li, Qiushan Jun had been severely wounded and had not displayed his abilities for an entire year. As a consequence, it was impossible to appraise his current level of strength, so it could only be saved for later.

This explanation was very clear, but it was utterly lacking in persuasiveness. What sort of place was the Pavilion of Heavenly

Secrets? Even if Qiushan Jun had not confronted an enemy, could it be impossible to assess his level? This wasn't even discussing the fact that last year, Xuanyuan Po had entered the Proclamation of Azure Sky similarly without a single fight, so how was he able to be ranked?

The Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets gave no further explanation and very few people knew the real reason.

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The world was very lively, but Mount Li was very quiet.

Before Su Li left, he had left a message: the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect should not be afraid of getting into trouble, but they shouldn't cause any trouble either.

"With the confluence of the north and south, the situation is unstable and those Zhou people and noble families of the south are too crafty and secretive. Since we're not their match, just live quietly in the mountain."

These were his original words.

After Su Li left, there was a feeling of sinking down to the bottom and then rising up once more.



The second generation experts of the Sword Hall, Mount Li's most powerful experts, were all quietly resting due to their injuries. At present, Gou Hanshi and the other third generation disciples were administering affairs. Many people believed that these young swordsmen would find it very challenging to stabilize Mount Li. However, after that bloody battle in the mountain creek in which Guan Feibai severed sixteen hands, the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws proved to the entire south why they were called the Seven Laws. This was because they strictly maintained discipline, their Dao hearts brightly lit. In the future, they would assuredly enter the Divine Kingdom amongst the sea of stars.

After removing the final effects of the internal strife, Mount Li finally returned to peace.

Gou Hanshi and the rest attentively studied, cultivated, planted crops, and in these calm days, comprehended the true meaning of the path of the sword.

On a certain night, Gou Hanshi awoke from his meditation and gazed off at the distant mountains. He only saw the silver starlight, but the once-familiar scene was suddenly accompanied by many different meanings and sounds.

He thought of his childhood, those difficult days in which the feeble mother and only son accompanied each other, and a sparkling and translucent aura appeared in his eyes.

His body seemed to leak starlight and was also sparkling and

translucent.

"Congratulations to Second Elder Brother!"

Guan Feibai, Liang Banhu, Bai Cai, and several dozen more of the Mount Li Sword Sect's third generation disciples happily called out as they gazed at the beautiful sight on the cliff edge.

Gou Hanshi turned around to look at his junior brothers, saying, "The sea of swords is boundless, but all of us must dauntlessly move forward."

Guan Feibai replied, "Back at the Grand Examination, if Chen Changsheng had not gone crazy and put his life on the line and Senior Brother had not taken pity on him for his difficulties in cultivating, how could he have snatched first rank of the first banner? Today, Senior Brother has succeeded in entering Star Condensation, but I don't know if he'll have the face to mention this when we meet again at the Boiling Stone Summit."

Gou Hanshi calmly replied, "Chen Changsheng has not even learned of this matter yet. In addition, a defeat is a defeat, and is it glorious to not dare to put one's life on the line? Let alone the fact that I'm older than him, a step ahead on my path of cultivation. On what aspect should I be proud? Junior Brother, these words of yours are extremely improper."

"Although he hasn't actually talked about it, everyone is saying... the future Pope, tsk tsk, truly grand."

Cold arrogance on his face, Guan Feibai proclaimed, "Senior Brother is overflowing with kindness and does not want to make him lose face, but I don't care. When the time comes, I will definitely fight a bout with him."

Gou Hanshi shook his head, advising, "If you really have a mind to compete for superiority, there's no harm in waiting for the war with the demons to begin. You can compare with him to see who can kill the most demons."

Upon hearing the word 'demons', Liang Banhu slightly lowered his head while Bai Cai worriedly glanced behind him at the dwelling illuminated under the starlight.

Liang Xiaoxiao had colluded with the demons. He was Liang Banhu's brother by blood.

As for the person in the dwelling...her mother was a demon.

Logically, Gou Hanshi should have paid more attention to such details, but he had deliberately chosen to not refrain from using this word. In his view, since they were all disciples of Mount Li, fated to live and die together, to interact with each other day and night, to speak out these things, to thoroughly discuss them, and to talk about them until no one cared, was truly in accord with the path of the sword of Mount Li.

Seeing that the mood was rather downcast, someone attempted to joke, "If we're really judging merit based on number of kills, then whether it's Fourth Eldest Brother or Chen Changsheng, I'm

afraid none of them can catch up to that wolf cub. After all, this sort of matter isn't based solely on whose swordplay is better."

He had originally wanted to make a joke, but the result was an even gloomier mood.

At present, there were several names that could not be mentioned in Mount Li.

The door to the dwelling slowly opened and Qi Jian walked out.

Currently, she was garbed in female clothes. There was still a juvenile air about her and her body was very thin, causing others to feel pity for her.

Guan Feibai said, "Junior...Sister, it's late and cold, and your illness is not cured. Why did you come out?"

Qi Jian softly replied, "I heard all of you mention him."

Guan Feibai consoled, "Even though he managed to win successive victories over us in the matches of the Grand Examination, I don't bear him any ill will. On the contrary, he's one of the people that has obtained my hard-won admiration. But Martial Granduncle is doing this for your sake. In the end, he's still a demi-human-human hybrid..."

"And so what?" Qi Jian's pale and petite face was filled with stubbornness. "My mother was a Demon Princess, but he could

marry her, so why can't I marry a demi-human?"

Guan Feibai was at a loss for words, mumbling, "But Martial Granduncle said, he doesn't have long to live."

Qi Jian's petite face paled even more, asking, "Could it be that everything he says is right?"

From the moment Su Li had forbidden her from leaving, Qi Jian had not once called him 'father'.

Gou Hanshi sighed and prepared to say a few words of consolation.

"There's no need to talk."

Qi Jian said grievously, "If Eldest Brother were here, he would definitely help me think of a way, not be like you lot, only thinking of staying penned up in this mountain."

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Mount Li's Martial Granduncle had left, Mount Li's Eldest Brother had also left, and no one knew where he had gone.

His name could not be found on the Proclamation of Liberation and he was seemingly impossible to find in the world.

In the distant snowy plains of the north, there was a rather obscure military fort called 'Seven Li Xi'.

It was said that many years ago, this place was the territory of the Xi race. Later on, the Xi race was utterly wiped out by the demons as they encroached southwards. When the human army triumphed in their northern expedition, they ended up occupying this area.

This place was the closest to the Demon Army and farthest from the human world.

Today, the general and his lieutenants were engaged in a night-long meeting. Amidst the curling smoke, their faces plastered with worried frowns could be seen.

It wasn't because the demons' wolf cavalry had once again come harassing and killing, nor was it because there was a problem in the supply chain. On the contrary, in the past few days, Seven Li Xi had been very peaceful and secure. Even the taverns in the city were mixing much less water in their wine and those cultivating experts who usually had nothing but cold expressions were all smiles.

When encountering the demons' wolf cavalry, Seven Li Xi's roaming cavalry had obtained victory after inconceivable victory.

The reason for the frowns of the general and his lieutenants was that they were calculating how to give military merit to this roaming cavalry group, especially that young officer.

# Chapter 555 - The Reason I'm Here Is For Blood And Wine

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"I've never met a perfect officer like him before. So strong, and he can even make every one of his troops show their full potential. Chen Chou, as their commander, you should know just how lazy and useless those members of that group of roaming cavalry were at the beginning."

"Anyone will admit to his usefulness in those battles, but to speak of perfection...guzzling wine and brawling every day, just how is that perfect? Do we still want military discipline or not? I agree to assigning him merit, but correspondingly, shouldn't we also give him punishment for violating the prohibition?"

"If he were my subordinate, if he brought back ten-odd wolf cavalry corpses every time he went on patrol, then let alone drinking and brawling, as long as it wasn't murder or arson, I would be willing to endure anything. Punishment? I only wish I could wash his feet every day!"

"Aren't you all forgetting one very important problem? He was sent to us by the military tribunal of the Northern Expedition Administration...I hear that only if you offend some very important figure there will you get sent to some remote region like this. If his name is placed on the register of military merits, might the military administration have some opinion?"

"Even if they do, does that mean we should suppress his military achievements? This will cause the soldiers to become disillusioned!"



"Who said we were going to suppress his military achievements? Aren't we just thinking of the most suitable method?"

"Everyone, stop talking! Military merit is military merit, and if we should punish, we should punish...with the military merit he has achieved in the past few days, there's even a chance that he will be conferred a noble title, but given how he has violated the military prohibitions in the past few days, beheading isn't out of the question either. I see that both sides are in conflict, so let's issue him a commendation, but as for the monetary reward, we will hold it for now."

The noisy tent was instantly silenced. Everyone turned to the general seated at the very front, subconsciously wanting to oppose this decision. However, upon careful thought, handling matters this way was the best method, and then they all couldn't but turn as one towards that deputy general called Chen Chou, their eyes filled with sympathy or schadenfreude.

Chen Chou was extremely angry. He picked up his helmet from the table and exited the tent.

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The reason for his colleagues' schadenfreude or sympathy, and the reason for his anger, was that everyone keenly understood that with the young officer's personality, he would definitely fly into a

rage upon hearing this news. Moreover, no one, not even the general himself, was willing to directly confront that fellow's fury.

"What? Only a commendation but no money?"

The layout of the barracks was very simple and crude, the things within all heavy and cumbersome. Fortunately, the wooden table in the middle holding an oil lamp and a dozen or so wine cups was not flipped over.

Chen Chou naturally did not expect to see any good expression after this officer learned the result of the discussion in the officers' tent, but he did not think that this person's response would be so severe. He quickly held him fast and incessantly consoled, "The commendation is a good thing! The general went against the pressure of the military administration to confer it upon you!"

Only with this inflexible embrace was everything on the table spared from being shattered into pieces by this person's, this officer's, rage.

This officer's armor was covered in dust, as was his face. Paired with his whiskers that had not been groomed in a very long time, he looked very filthy.

Nevertheless, his eyes were bright, clear, and deep. Only by seeing his eyes would people realize that he was just a young man of twenty-some years.

The young officer struggled free of Chen Chou's hands, walked over to the table, and poured a pot of wine down his throat as he fumed, "I refuse to accept this."

Chen Chou helplessly replied, "My little devil, could it be that you're lacking in that little bit of money?"

The young officer slammed the wine pot on the table and said, "I'm just not convinced. Why, after I achieved so much, could it be that I can't exchange it for fifty taels of silver?"

Chen Chou glanced outside the barracks and said, "Last time... you killed the prisoners too ruthlessly."

The young officer waved his hands. "Just where did this rumor come from? How could I do such a gory thing? Only you Zhou troops like to do that sort of thing."

"Pay attention to your words. Although you're a southerner, at the moment, we only have one army."

"Fine, since we're all one family, why can't you give me any money?"

"Just what do you want this money for?"

"If you don't want money, what can you want?"

"The general said, if you're willing to have your name registered, with the speed at which you're accumulating merit, you'll quickly surpass everyone in Seven Li Xi, even..."

Chen Chou looked at him, his emotions complex as he continued, "In five years, you could become a new Divine General."

Upon hearing this, the young officer seemed to be stunned for a few moments. Then, he smiled and said, "I'm not interested in this sort of thing."

In the Great Zhou Army, if anyone else heard this statement, they would definitely regard the speaker as a madman.

But Chen Chou showed no surprise because this was not the first time he had heard such words.

"Just what sort of person are you?" he asked the young officer.

The young officer replied, "I'm just a young man that loves money and easily gets angry."

As he spoke, his eyes were extremely calm.

In reality, previously when he was shaking the table and cursing the general's mother, his eyes had been similarly calm without any hint of real rage.

Chen Chou sighed, saying, "I really don't understand the strange hobbies people like you have. Why pretend to be a crude person?"

The young officer got close and seriously asked, "Was I not acting like one?"

Chen Chou took the measure of him then assessed, "Clothing, appearance, and personality are all rather similar, it's just your eyes that are different."

Back then, the reason he was able to see that this young officer was no ordinary person was through his eyes.

No matter if he were facing a hundred wolf cavalry or that demon expert, this young officer's eyes would always be exceedingly calm—this sort of composure signified an absolute self-confidence that could imbue confidence in others, whether it was the young officer himself, the forty-odd roaming cavalry under him, or even his nominal commanding officer, deputy-general Chen Chou.

After this conversation, Chen Chou was all the more certain that this young officer was a truly powerful personage.

Only a truly powerful personage could have these sorts of eyes, and only a truly powerful figure could express such disdain for something like becoming a Divine General.

If he had not confirmed that the transfer papers were all in order,

Chen Chou would not have dared to allow this young officer to remain in his unit. But even today, he still did not understand why such a powerful figure would come to such a desolate and dangerous place as Seven Li Xi, and just what he wanted to do.

Tonight, he finally could not hold back this question.

The young officer gazed out of the barracks at the snowstorm, smiling. He seemed rather exhausted but very serene, no anxiety or impatience on his face.

He did not answer Chen Chou's question, instead indifferently saying, "To drink wine."

Although Chen Chou knew that this officer was a powerful figure, in the military fort, he was still his subordinate. Moreover, in the past few days, they had braved the snow and ice together, fought side by side and engaged in many bloody battles with the demon cavalry. He had long become familiar with this refusal, but he still couldn't help but get angry and yell, "You only know how to drink and drink! I'm seriously asking you here!"

The young officer was startled and then roared with laughter. "Ah, I'm also seriously answering."

His smile faded, and as he gazed out at the wind and snow, he continued, "Here, the wine is strongest and demons to kill the most abundant, assisting people in calming their hearts."

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# Chapter 556 - The Boiling Stone Summit

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To calm the heart with strong wine and the blood of one's foes: carefully considered, these words were incredibly heroic.

For a while, Chen Chou said nothing. Finally, he spoke, "At the very beginning, I knew that you were drowning your sorrows in wine because of a woman."

The young officer smiled, saying, "Yesterday, I received a letter sent by her from the south. She found that person she thought to be dead, and...it's such a coincidence, that person is actually that fiancé that she hated so much. Tell me, do you think I should congratulate them or congratulate them?"

Chen Chou looked at him with much more sympathy. Patting him on the shoulder, he soothed, "Then if it's really over, it's better not to think about it anymore."

Back on the snowy plains, on that night when they were surrounded by wolf cavalry, the two had chatted about many things. Of course, what they had talked about the most was men and women, so he could roughly guess at what was going on with this story.

The young officer's eyes suddenly glowed as if illuminating the dark night, the wind and snow, and the path within. He calmly but firmly replied, "No, if that person had really died, I would naturally not be able to beat him and I would have no hope. But now that he's alive, it also means that my hope has been reborn."



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Summer was coming to an end and autumn was beginning to set in, the Boiling Stone Summit about to convene. At various locations in the continent, people began to set out.

Unlike the Grand Examination and the Garden of Zhou, the Boiling Stone Summit was not famous. Knowledge of it only circulated in the upper layers of the cultivating world, and only those worthy of being invited knew of it. Every time the Boiling Stone Summit convened, it would always do so at the Heaven Lake in the distant Mount Han at the northeast of the continent. Regardless of whether one departed from the capital, Tianliang county, or from the south, reaching the Heaven Lake required traversing a great distance. To many people, rather than the Boiling Stone Summit being a grand meeting of the cultivating world, it was better to call it a journey.

Of course, to cultivators at this level, a journey had always been a sort of cultivation. As a result, very few people used immortal birds or arrays to travel, instead walking along the official roads that ran all across the human world. They crossed through dense spider webs of rivers, soaked in the scenery, and earnestly advanced forward.

It was said that countless years ago, innumerable meteorites crashed down upon the continent in streaks of fire. Many of these

meteorites fell at the present-day location of the capital at the place where soil formed into a mountain. Those meteorites became the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, opening the minds of the continent's lifeforms. That location was the Mausoleum of Books. Besides those meteorites that fell into the Mausoleum of Books, many meteorites were burned into ash in the sky while many others returned to the sea of stars. There were some fortunate, or unfortunate, meteorites that did not fall into the Mausoleum of Books, nor were they rendered into ash. Instead, they shattered into countless stones and fell upon the earth. These stones were named Heavenstones.

Miraculously, these Heavenstones did not scatter over the continent. Instead, just like the Mausoleum of Books, the vast majority of them fell in the same place.

This location was Mount Han in the northeast of the continent, and they were particularly numerous around the Heaven Lake at the peak of Mount Han.

Those Heavenstones had been burned too severely, leaving no mystical lines on their surfaces, nor did they possess the wonder of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. Still, these Heavenstones were ultimately existences that shared the same origin as the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, and so to cultivators, they were still incomparably precious. It was said that many experts had used these Heavenstones to successfully break through their original cultivation levels.

What the Boiling Stone Summit boiled was these Heavenstones. Of course, it was impossible for countless stoves to pop up on the

shore of the Heaven Lake to heat water for this purpose. The boiling stones had always been boiled in the Heaven Lake itself, because the water within the Heaven Lake was the congregation of many hot springs and its temperature was incredibly high, like the world's natural stove.

The Boiling Stone Summit was precisely a grand meeting held for the sake of increasing the cultivating speed of the human world's cultivators. As long as one was ranked at the top in the Boiling Stone Summit, one would be qualified to obtain a Heavenstone to comprehend and receive. The wonder of the Heavenstones was far inferior to that of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, but the Heavenly Tome Monoliths were in the Mausoleum of Books, while the Heavenstones could be carried on the body and interacted with whenever one wished. Consequently, to cultivators, the importance of the Heavenstones was no less than that of the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, and to certain people, it might even be greater.

As for when the Boiling Stone Summit was held, after Emperor Taizong returned to the sea of stars, the Five Saints and the Eight Storms jointly drew up a plan, with the Elder of Heavenly Secrets placed in charge of organizing it all. The specific time at which it was held could only be decided after looking at the cultivating situation of the younger generation of experts. Only after confirming that their cultivation levels were enough to comprehend the Heavenstones would they decide to hold one.

As Emperor Taizong's generation gradually took a step back from history's stage, the cultivating world gradually grew more cold and cheerless, with the Boiling Stone Summit not being held once over the span of several decades. It was not until Wang Po shocked the

world and the cultivation world once more entered a generation of blooming flowers that the frequency at which the Boiling Stone Summit convened gradually increased.

The most important objective of the Boiling Stone Summit was for the cultivating geniuses of the human world to gain some assistance at the most critical points of their cultivation, thus allowing them to quickly recognize their obstructions and advance over them. Thus, very few were invited. For example, this year, only thirty-some young cultivators were on the invitation list.

On this list, there was the famous name of the Heavenly Dao Academy's Guan Bai. Qiushan Jun was there, as was right. Naturally, Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng were also present, as well as Gou Hanshi and fourth place on the Proclamation of Golden Distinction, Zhong Hui. Although Zhexiu and Tang Thirty-Six failed to enter the Proclamation of Golden Distinction, this did not mean that the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets did not view them highly, so they were also on the list.

Besides these names that were familiar by dint of repetition, the list also contained a few obscure wandering cultivators and experts of small sects. Those wandering cultivators and small sect experts were all forty-some years old. In the cultivation world, they were still rated as rather young, but when compared to those young geniuses above, they were older by quite the margin.

Several hundred Orthodoxy cavalry escorted several carriages out of the capital.

These Orthodoxy cavalry and Divine Generals all had cold

expressions and exuded a stern aura, but they could not obstruct the resolve and courage of the denizens of the capital to see the excitement.

Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang were sitting in two different carriages, their eyes closed in rest as if ignorant to the shouts from outside.

Those shouts were all aimed at the people within that carriage.

Within this carriage, Tang Thirty-Six placed down the list in his hands and scratched his ears that had gotten somewhat itchy from all the yells. Shaking his head, he said, "They don't even know what we're doing, so why are they yelling so loud, and there's Rou'er...I just gave you one thousand taels of silver last night. What are you planning, acting like you're sending off your husband?"

He looked at the upstairs of a building by the street at the mournful dancing girl leaning on the balcony, the expression on his face rather unnatural.

No one paid him any attention, and no one was interested in him, or else he would have been even more embarrassed.

Zhexiu had his eyes closed in rest. His true essence traveled along his somewhat deformed meridians like a scraping small knife, but no pain could be seen on his face.

Chen Changsheng was studying a Daoist scripture, his expression focused and serious, while his sea of consciousness performed incessant calculations to find a way to break down the array left behind by Wang Zhice.

Tang Thirty-Six felt somewhat ashamed, thinking, why can't I detach myself from all things like these two?

"You hear...there's actually a person who's guessing that you're going to South Stream Temple to propose!"

A burst of shouts rang out from the streets. Upon hearing them, Tang Thirty-Six rocked back and forth in laughter, incredibly amused.

"Fancy that some people would think of that, but this sort of display really is rather similar. If one wants to marry the Holy Maiden, one definitely needs to dispatch two Prefects of the Orthodoxy."

This was speaking of Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang who were seated in the carriages in front of them.

In this year's Boiling Stone Summit, only Chen Changsheng and his group were departing from the capital, but a vast force had been mobilized, even sending two archbishops to personally escort them.

This was because Chen Changsheng's status was no longer the

same and the journey was long. Moreover, Mount Han was not far from the land of demons, and who knew if the demons might not move against this future Pope? With two grand experts at the peak of Star Condensation personally standing guard, it would presumably be much safer.

Chen Changsheng kept his head low, focused on his book and showing no response.

Tang Thirty-Six finally felt that something was off. Giving him a few pats, he asked, "What are you thinking about?"

Chen Changsheng raised his head and took out two balls of fur from his ears. Somewhat vacantly, he asked, "What's wrong?"

Tang Thirty-Six was quite speechless. Pointing at the paper, he said, "Shouldn't you be concerned about what sort of opponents you will face in the Boiling Stone Summit?"

Chen Changsheng froze for a moment, then smiled and replied, "I don't plan to step onto the stage."

To cultivators, the Heavenstones were naturally extremely precious objects of comprehension, but to him and Xu Yourong, the effectiveness of this sort of comprehension was almost nil.

The Heavenly Tome Monoliths were in their hands, so there was no need to care about some Heavenstones.

His reason for attending the Boiling Stone Summit, besides broadening his experiences, was to meet a few people. For example, because of Scholartree Manor's Zhong Hui, Wang Po might make an appearance at the Heaven Lake. As another example, Gou Hanshi and the rest of the Mount Li Sword Sect disciples that he had not met for so long were also coming. Or for example, she who he had parted from not too long ago.

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "That's true, you're the future Pope, so it's truly inappropriate for you to fight with the rest of us. Moreover, you can enter the Mausoleum of Books whenever you want, to see whatever Heavenly Tome Monolith you want to see. If you want to bring your girl to look at the Heavenly Tome Monoliths together, you'll take her..."

Chen Changsheng glanced at Zhexiu. Only after affirming that Zhexiu had absolutely no interest in their conversation did he relax.

Seeing his nervous expression, Tang Thirty-Six shook his head and then placed that list of names in Chen Changsheng's hand. "Even if you don't plan to fight, our most powerful opponents will definitely be these guys from the Mount Li Sword Sect. The demi-humans will also be sending people. I hear that even Xiao De of the Proclamation of Liberation will be coming."

Upon hearing Xiao De's name, Zhexiu suddenly opened his eyes and asked, "Confirmed?"

"Basically confirmed." Tang Thirty-Six creased his brow at him and asked, "Do you have a grudge against that guy?"



Zhexiu asked, "If I do, will you help me?"

Tang Thirty-Six responded in a matter-of-fact manner, "Of course not, that's an expert of the Proclamation of Liberation's top five, and was I that close to you?"

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On the long journey, there were fresh sights, but not many fresh stories.

Chen Changsheng spent the vast majority of the time reading, cultivating, and thinking. He would treat Zhexiu's illness, and then the two would look together at Tang Thirty-Six who, due to his boredom, was getting sharper and unkindier by the day. Occasionally, Mao Qiuyu would find him to chat about a few things. However, other than when they were eating in the wilderness, he actually never saw Linghai Zhiwang.

Just as summer was on the verge of departing, the convoy finally arrived at Mount Han.

This place was in the extreme north. Once one passed that unbroken line of mountain peaks, one would enter the bounds of the demon realm's snowy plains. Moreover, as one approached the mountains, the ground also increased in altitude. The temperature

continued to decrease and it seemed as if the deep winter had come in advance. The armor of the Orthodoxy cavalry was gradually covered in a thin layer of frost.

# Chapter 557 - In Front Of Multitudes, The Peak Is Lonely

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'Mount Han' was this line of unbroken mountain peaks, and it was also used to refer to the highest and most solitary peak.

Chen Changsheng raised the curtain and gazed at the lonely peak in silence, comparing it to the solitary peak behind Xining Village, but he could not determine which was higher.

He was familiar with the solitary peak in the middle of the Cloud Grave and knew that it occupied a vast amount of space, but he never knew how tall it was because it was always obscured by the clouds.

Suddenly, he began to miss the old temple outside Xining Village, to miss his teacher and senior.

Before entering Mount Han, there was a small village. It was said that this place was the final place ordinary people could permanently reside.

Perhaps because cultivators would travel to the Heaven Lake year-round, the village was not at all desolate. It was actually rather lively, home to some two thousand people.

Unlike the commoners of other places, the inhabitants of the small village were clearly informed on the Boiling Stone Summit. Upon seeing the convoy from the Li Palace and the Orthodoxy

cavalry, they respectfully and solemnly yielded the way. They were under the care and jurisdiction of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, but they were also believers of the Orthodoxy and did not dare to show the slightest disrespect.

Somewhat surprisingly, the convoy stopped outside the small village.

After a moment, Chen Changsheng heard Mao Qiuyu's voice, "The people of the village heard that you were also in the convoy. They wish to see you."

Chen Changsheng was a little taken aback. He didn't think about it too much, thinking that if they wanted to see him, then he would go. He stood and prepared to exit the carriage but was stopped by Tang Thirty-Six.

"You're prepared to go out just like this?" Tang Thirty-Six asked him.

Zhexiu looked at Chen Changsheng and also shook his head.

"What's wrong with how I am now?" Chen Changsheng said as he examined himself. Because of the long journey, he wore the most comfortable cotton school uniform of the Orthodox Academy. Given how long he had spent sitting, it had inevitably become somewhat wrinkled, but it was still very clean. He didn't feel that anything about his clothes was improper.

Tang Thirty-Six took out a brand-new set of clothes and threw it over, saying, "For this occasion, you should be somewhat more serious, because they're all very serious."

Chen Changsheng took the clothes and realized it was a Daoist robe that the Li Palace had sent over in the spring.

This Daoist robe was made with the finest materials and tailored meticulously. Most importantly, woven upon it was a complex design signifying his status.

He was currently not the Pope, so he could not wear the Divine Robe. This Daoist robe was special, representing his status as the future Pope.

The reason Linghai Zhiwang refused to show himself the entire journey was probably that he did not wish to see Chen Changsheng wearing this Daoist robe.

No one had imagined that Chen Changsheng had not worn it even once.

He put on the brand-new Daoist robe and, with Tang Thirty-Six's assistance, tidied up all the details. As all this was going on, Chen Changsheng's expression was becoming increasingly conscientious.

Tang Thirty-Six had spoken correctly. Those people waiting to see him were all very serious and solemn, so he really should be

more solemn and serious.

"Is it okay?"

After he finished putting on the Daoist robe, he asked Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu.

Zhexiu nodded while Tang Thirty-Six noted, "You've still forgotten the most important thing."

Chen Changsheng's hand fell upon his sword hilt then slowly departed.

A wooden staff exuding a faint divine aura appeared in his hands.

"I'm going," he said to Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu.

Holding the Divine Staff, he stepped firmly out of the carriage.

The world outside instantly grew quiet. In the distance, the cry of a young eagle could be heard from the distant snowy peaks of Mount Han.

A tide of innumerable believers, a dense mass of people, kneeled down in worship.

The several hundred Orthodoxy cavalry also kneeled down.

Wearing a Daoist robe, the Divine Staff in his hands, Chen Changsheng stood before the tide, his young face somewhat nervous.

He did not know how he should address this sort of scene.

He strenuously recalled all those important figures he had met: the Pope, Su Li, and the Holy Maiden.

Finally, he thought of Xu Yourong and his nervousness gradually faded, transforming into calm and sincere gratitude.

As he gazed at the pious masses paying him respect, he used his calmest voice to say, "May the Sacred Light be with all of you."

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"\*\*\*\*, just where did he learn those words from? Really...I can't laugh at him this time."

Tang Thirty-Six had used his finger to raise the curtain a little and was viewing the scene outside in shock.

Zhexiu did not descend from the carriage because he had no interest in these sorts of things.

Tang Thirty-Six did not descend from the carriage for another reason.

In this sort of situation, he wouldn't go out even if he were beaten to death, because once he appeared, he would also have to kneel down in respect to Chen Changsheng.

Last year when the Pope affirmed Chen Changsheng's status, Tang Thirty-Six had called an emergency meeting in the Orthodox Academy. In this meeting, he explicitly stated that if there was no way around kneeling down and worshipping Chen Changsheng outside, then once they returned to the Orthodox Academy, Chen Changsheng would have to return a kneel to Tang Thirty-Six.

Zhexiu clearly understood why Tang Thirty-Six did not leave the carriage, but he was rather confused as to why he didn't mock and ridicule Chen Changsheng like normal.

Tang Thirty-Six gazed out the window at the scene, very calm and very satisfied, seeming to be thinking about something.

He was thinking about the conversation he had with Chen Changsheng on the Orthodox Academy's great banyan tree.

Perhaps it wouldn't be long before he had to return to Wenshui, succeed to the family, and bear his own responsibility, to be the wealthiest in the world but be trapped in one city. But before that, he had lived frivolously, he had strived and struggled together with his companions, and he had even fulfilled the promise he had



made.

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After departing the village, they quickly reached the mountain gate of Mount Han.

Chen Changsheng asked curiously, "Beyond this is the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets?"

The Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets was the world's most famous place, but quite interestingly, very few people knew of its actual location.

Given Chen Changsheng's current status, if he wanted to find out, he naturally could, but just like how he had been rather ignorant of the common sense of the cultivation world when he first entered the capital, he truly wasn't very interested in this sort of thing. Comparatively, the knowledge in books was far more important.

"Idiot, if the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets were here, every update of the Proclamations would be very slow."

Knowing without any need to ask, the only person that would still dare to speak to Chen Changsheng like this and also loved to talk was naturally Tang Thirty-Six.

Chen Changsheng pointed at the mountain gate and said, "But 'Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets' is written up there."

Tang Thirty-Six was quite fed up with Chen Changsheng's lack of intelligence on this subject, explaining, "Wherever the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets goes to manage some affair, that place becomes the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets. For instance, at the moment, the Boiling Stone Summit is about to begin, so this place is now the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets. If the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets needed to go to Dongchuan to open the auction, then Dongchuan would be the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets."

Chen Changsheng very seriously digested these words, but he still didn't understand what was going on.

On the side, Zhexiu commented, "Deliberately mystifying."

The Orthodoxy cavalry halted before the mountain gate.

Linghai Zhiwang gazed at Chen Changsheng and emotionlessly said, "Do not shame the Li Palace."

Saying this, he turned and proceeded back down the mountain path.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat confused.

Mao Qiuyu explained to him, "We can only send you up to here. You will have to walk the rest of the way yourself."

"Eh?" This was clearly the first time Tang Thirty-Six had heard of such a rule. He asked, "Why?"

Mao Qiuyu answered, "Those without invitation cannot be within five hundred li of Mount Han. These are the rules of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Could it be that other than the people on the list, no one else can go in?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Of course not, back when my father attended the Boiling Stone Summit, the clan's Guardians were with him the entire time."

"Those without invitation cannot enter. The Elder of Heavenly Secrets did not invite us into Mount Han, so we naturally cannot enter."

As Mao Qiuyu spoke, his emotions seemed rather complex.

Chen Changsheng was even more confused, thinking, the Orthodoxy is the religion of the world. Even if the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets is powerful, how can it slight the Orthodoxy so?

Tang Thirty-Six blurted out, "There's definitely some problem between His Holiness and the Elder of Heavenly Secrets."

Mao Qiuyu glanced at him, then chuckled and shook his head. Turning around, he departed down the mountain with the Orthodoxy cavalry.

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Upon entering Mount Han, one fell under the jurisdiction of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets. Naturally, safety was also the responsibility of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets.

Tang Thirty-Six had guessed correctly: there must have been some unknown grudge between the Pope and the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, causing the Elder of Heavenly Secrets to act very rudely to the Orthodoxy and forbid Mao Qiuyu, Linghai Zhiwang, and the rest of the Orthodoxy's convoy from entering Mount Han. However, he still displayed respect towards the future Pope.

A steward of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets was already standing at the mountain path, his expression reverential.

Chen Changsheng recognized this person. It was precisely that Star Condensation painter responsible for recording the battles of the Martial Exhibition in front of the Orthodox Academy.

Today, Mount Han was opening and all the cultivators that had come from the various places of the continent were all on the path

into the mountain.

Under the guidance of the steward of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, Chen Changsheng and the other two did not need to travel far before encountering quite a few other groups of cultivators.

As expected, forbidding entry to those without invitation was a rule targeted at the Orthodoxy. Amongst these cultivators, there were clearly experts who had come to help their juniors keep the situation under control.

But whether it was those senior experts of deep cultivations or those self-confident and proud young experts, whenever they met Chen Changsheng, they hurriedly yielded the path.

No ordinary person could enter Mount Han—each of them naturally possessed extraordinary vision. None of the cultivators had a guide, and they had to walk the mountain path on their own. However, Chen Changsheng and his group had a high-ranked steward of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets leading the way, meaning that he was assuredly no ordinary person.

When Chen Changsheng passed them, someone seemed to recognize him and the mountain path was momentarily filled with suppressed cries and gasps. They all realized that simply yielding the way was insufficient and people hurriedly began to bow. There was even one pious wandering cultivator that knelt down on the mountain path and kowtowed to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng was prepared to do something when he

suddenly saw a person up ahead.

This person had a delicate and handsome appearance, an aura of cold faintly discernible on his face, and he wore a yellow gown. It was Scholartree Manor's Zhong Hui.

The young scholar that had taken part in last year's Grand Examination had become much more composed and the Qi emitted from his body was also much stronger.

The mountain path suddenly grew quiet

The story involving Chen Changsheng and the people of the Orthodox Academy against the students of Scholartree Manor at last year's Grand Examination, and even its continuation in the Mausoleum of Books, had long been known by others.

The mood became rather tense. No one knew what Zhong Hui would do and how Chen Changsheng would respond.

After quite some time had passed, Zhong Hui slowly bent at the waist and clasped his hands.

His posture was abnormally proper, his manners impeccable.

# Chapter 558 - Virtuous, And Also A Highwayman

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No one could see whether Zhong Hui's current expression was one of resentment, unwillingness, or if he had no expression at all.

Time truly could change many things.

In the short span of a year, Zhong Hui's cultivation had advanced by leaps and bounds, and now he was fourth-ranked on the Proclamation of Golden Distinction.

But now his rival was no longer on the same level.

This wasn't speaking in terms of cultivation, but status.

Even if their strengths were similar, could Zhong Hui dare show any disrespect to Chen Changsheng?

The mountain path was still silent.

Innumerable gazes fell upon Chen Changsheng.

As long as he did not speak, Zhong Hui had to maintain his posture of courtesy.

Tang Thirty-Six's lips seemed to carry a smear of ridicule as he

prepared to speak.

Zhexiu shook his head.

As time slowly passed, the steward of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets slightly creased his brow. He did not dare criticize Chen Changsheng for anything, but it could be presumed that he had been thinking of it.

Chen Changsheng was not deliberately humiliating Zhong Hui, he just had not come around yet. He did not expect for Zhong Hui to bow to him.

Even when those believers were all kowtowing to him in that village at the base of the mountain, he did not feel himself to be the future Pope.

Suddenly, everyone on the mountain took in a breath of cold air.

Because Chen Changsheng had acted.

He clasped his hands, bent his body, and returned the bow to Zhong Hui. There was no disrespect and his posture was impeccable.

With his current status, if Zhong Hui reverentially bowed to him, he only needed to say a few words in return.



But he very seriously returned the bow. In addition, he had used the etiquette meant for fellow cultivators of the same generation.

The previously frosty atmosphere instantly thawed. Everyone looked at Chen Changsheng, deeply moved and sighing in admiration.

Everyone rejoiced, except Tang Thirty-Six. Only Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu could hear him say, "Perhaps everyone that reads too much ends up this way?"

Chen Changsheng turned to him and asked, "How was it?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "You turned into Gou Hanshi."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Thank you."

In his view, to be able to become a person like Gou Hanshi was definitely praise.

Tang Thirty-Six sneered, "A hypocrite."

Chen Changsheng froze, then he very helplessly shook his head and continued forward along the mountain path.

The hundred-some cultivators very naturally followed behind him. No one dared to walk in front of him.

The group on the mountain seemed to have quite some momentum now, yet they did not walk very far before coming to a halt once more.

This time, it wasn't because some old acquaintance who had some old story with Chen Changsheng had appeared on the mountain path, but because a person was intentionally standing in the middle of the path, blocking the way.

Chen Changsheng did not recognize this person, but many other people did.

Fifth rank on the Proclamation of Liberation, the youngest general of the demi-humans and the most talented expert of the past century given birth along the two shores of the Red River, excluding Princess Luoluo.

This demi-human expert had a very cute name: [Xiao De](#).

(Xiao De, 小德, means 'little/small virtue')

However, everyone that recognized him knew that this demi-human expert was not cute at all, and was actually very terrifying.

"You are Chen Changsheng?"

Xiao De looked at him as he spoke, his two bangs of black hair floating upwards, emanating an unyielding aura as they waved around.

As for the question, even someone with such surpassing patience as Chen Changsheng was somewhat fed up with hearing it, so he only nodded his head and did not speak.

In Xiao De's view, Chen Changsheng's refusal to open his mouth was a humiliation.

Or perhaps, he had been waiting for Chen Changsheng to humiliate him so that he could seize the opportunity to get angry.

"I am going to beat you to death," he said very seriously to Chen Changsheng.

His clean and clear pupils suddenly gushed with tawny rays of light while his body emitted a terrifyingly powerful Qi.

Chen Changsheng was somewhat confused. It was obvious that this demi-human expert was specifically targeting him. Of course, this person could not really beat him to death, but he was deliberately saying such ruthless and unreasonable words and putting on such a crude appearance in order to humiliate him.

This was confusing because, due to Luoluo, his relationship with the demi-humans had always been good. Last autumn, he had even received a reward from White Emperor City.

The crowd on the mountain path had all noticed the change in the scene. They thought the same as Chen Changsheng, all knowing that this demi-human expert could not really beat Chen

Changsheng to death, but this did not mean that this demi-human expert did not have the ability. It was just that Chen Changsheng's status was rather special.

No matter how amazing Chen Changsheng's talent was, even such that normal initial level Star Condensation cultivators were not his match, there was still a massive gap between him and the top five of the Proclamation of Liberation. It must be said that Xiao De could fight head-on with the likes of Wang Po and Xiao Zhang.

"You don't understand?" Tang Thirty-Six turned to him and asked.

Chen Changsheng nodded.

"Along the two shores of the Red River, the number of young experts wanting to marry Princess Luoluo is uncountable, and whether in terms of cultivation talent, strength, or family background, Xiao De has always been the one with the greatest hope of achieving this. This also means that if nothing too out of the ordinary occurs, in another few years, he would take Princess Luoluo as his wife. Moreover, if Princess Luoluo cannot inherit the techniques of the White Emperor, he would become the future sovereign of the demi-human realm. And it was you that rendered all this into froth and shadows."

After hearing Tang Thirty-Six's explanation, Chen Changsheng now felt different when he gazed at the demi-human expert on the mountain path.

"You changed the circumstances of Princess Luoluo's meridians, which was tantamount to changing the rules that governed the realm of demi-humans for tens of thousands of years. Whether you look at it from this angle or from the angle of your relationship with Princess Luoluo, if I were Xiao De, I would have more than enough reason to kill you."

After finishing his explanation, Tang Thirty-Six walked forward to stand before Xiao De.

Xiao De's body did not seem particularly tall or sturdy. Compared to Xuanyuan Po, he was clearly much thinner, but he gave off a sense of enormous weight.

This sort of feeling was the pressure released by a true expert.

Tang Thirty-Six's expression was extremely solemn. He knew more than anyone else on this mountain path that if this demi-human expert went crazy, he really would dare to attack Chen Changsheng. And the problem was that, no matter how he looked at it, this demi-human expert had every reason to go crazy.

"You know who I am," he said to Xiao De.

Xiao De narrowed his eyes, the fierce, tawny light in the depths of his pupils gradually fading. He somewhat adjusted his voice as he replied, "The Tang clan's young master."

"Since you've recognized me, that makes it convenient. Your

tribe has conducted business with us for countless years, so you should know very well that our Tang clan is made up of proper businessmen."

"What business do you want to discuss?"

"You want to marry Princess Luoluo?"

"All the tribes along the two shores of the Red River, and even the animals living deep in the mountains, know this." Xiao De's voice became grave as he warned, "By no means should you tell me that because he's Princess Luoluo's teacher, since I want to marry Princess Luoluo, I should treat him better, and that at the crucial stage, he might even help me by speaking up."

Tang Thirty-Six froze. After a moment, he sighed, "Who said that you demi-humans are all brainless?"

Xiao De smiled, "Presumably, a brainless human said it."

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Then we can't discuss business anymore?"

"Because this was never business, it was fraud." Xiao De gave a forced smile. "Seeing as the relationship between our two sides is good, I naturally can't blame you, but tell me, for what reason shouldn't I be angry at him? What's wrong with me wanting to beat him to death?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Just who is defrauding whom? When intelligence is required, you're smarter and more cool-headed than anyone else. When you want to play furious and straightforward, you take out this side of yourself. If we're talking business, just which side of you should I be talking with?"

"No matter which side of me you're talking with, you always have to state your conditions first."

Xiao De's smile faded and he said emotionlessly, "The two shores of the Red River, the eternal domain of the demi-humans, its countless inhabitants—I've lost so much. How much can you compensate me for?"

Just as Tang Thirty-Six was ready to speak, Chen Changsheng's voice rose, very calm and resolute.

"The two shores of the Red River, the eternal domain of the demi-humans, its countless inhabitants...this was never yours and you've never obtained it, so what loss is there to talk about?"

He walked to Tang Thirty-Six's side and looked at Xiao De. "I couldn't understand that talk of business you two were having, but I do know that whether doing business or discussing matters, you should never exchange something you've never owned for the corresponding profit."

As he spoke, he stared into Xiao De's eyes, his meaning exceptionally clear with no intent of retreat—the eight hundred li of the Red River was never yours, and Luoluo was also never yours.

Even if you are a demi-human expert atop the Proclamation of Liberation, what qualifications do you have to stand in front of me and speak of reasons, talk business, and demand compensation?

The mountain was deathly still, so quiet that even the birds seemed to have ceased their songs.

If one said that the previous silence when encountering Zhong Hui made people feel awkward from the tension, this current deathly stillness stirred in others a sense of unease.

This was because Chen Changsheng was confronting a demi-human expert that sat atop the Proclamation of Liberation. He had caused this demi-human expert to lose far too much profit, far more than Zhong Hui had ever lost. Moreover, even with the Wenshui Tang clan acting as a buffer, this demi-human expert was seemingly not prepared to lower his demands for compensation. And now, Chen Changsheng had displayed a rarely seen stalwartness.

Xiao De suddenly began to laugh, almost maniacally. The tawny luster in his eyes transformed into the brightest point on a wave of water.

Then he narrowed his eyes and said to Chen Changsheng, "It seems you believe that I wouldn't dare to beat you to death."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I don't believe you have the ability to beat me to death."



These two statements were two completely different things.

In Xiao De's view, even if Chen Changsheng was widely acknowledged to have talent far exceeding the ordinary cultivator, even though he had reached the peak of Ethereal Opening at the age of sixteen, had dealt successive defeats to the initial level Star Condensation experts of the capital's academies, and had even obtained victory over Xu Yourong on the Bridge of Helplessness... he still only needed to extend a finger to pinch Chen Changsheng to death.

But Chen Changsheng was the Pope's appointed successor...so he had used the word 'dare'.

Chen Changsheng had used the word 'ability'. Of course, he was no match for this fifth-ranked expert of the Proclamation of Liberation, but he still believed that he could not be so easily defeated.

His self-confidence naturally had its reasons, such as the countless swords in the Vault Sheath, such as the five stone pearls on his hand, such as the blade techniques he had learned in the Mausoleum of Books. He had many reasons, but other people did not know. Not even Tang Thirty-Six knew of the full strength of the Vault Sheath, so he felt these words rather peculiar.

This was a humiliation aimed at an expert of the Proclamation of Liberation.

# Chapter 559 - The Abrupt Appearance Of A Blue-Clothed Man

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The moment Xiao De appeared, the steward of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had secretly notified the people within Mount Han. However, when he saw the brightening brown light in Xiao De's darkening beast eyes, he knew that they would be too late. He prepared himself to rush in front of Chen Changsheng to defend him and then hope that a response would come from Mount Han as quickly as possible.

This demi-human expert known for both his intellect and his insanity, this proud son of heaven, once he resolved to move, would have certainly calculated all possibilities. Even if he wasn't able to kill Chen Changsheng, as long as he humiliated the future Pope somewhat, he would consider his goal accomplished. However, the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets was not willing to see this occur.

There might be problems between the Pope and the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, but how could the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets simply stand aside as the future Pope was humiliated on their own territory?

Besides the steward from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, there were also several dozen cultivators that simultaneously reached for the swords at their waists and warily gazed at Xiao De. As for that wandering cultivator that had kowtowed to Chen Changsheng, his sword was already in his hands, his eyes incredibly cold. It seemed that if Xiao De dared to strike, this cultivator would be willing to give up his life to protect Chen Changsheng's honor.

All this was because the vast majority of the several dozen cultivators on the mountain path were humans, and all believers of the Orthodoxy as well.

How could they allow the future Pope of the Orthodoxy to be humiliated by a demi-human?

Xiao De looked at those several dozen cultivators that were prepared to attack, a hint of scorn flashing through his eyes.

His expression did not turn any more solemn. On the contrary, he drew his hands behind his back, seeming to view them all with extreme disdain.

As he did so, his body that had originally not been very sturdy suddenly became a mountain peak.

He gazed over these human cultivators from high above.

He was a true expert, his Star Domain perfectly condensed. He could even faintly make out the line that divided the Divine Domain from the mortal world.

Under the Five Saints and the Storms of the Eight Directions, other than the top-ranked Divine Generals of the Great Zhou, the important figures of the Orthodoxy and the various sects, and those experts on the Proclamation of Liberation like Wang Po, Xiao Zhang and Liang Wangsun, who could be his match?

Wind blew out of the mountain forest, rolling up yellow leaves and bringing along an almost unimaginable pressure.

Whether it was that wandering cultivator with his sword drawn or those several dozen human cultivators ready to fight, they all suddenly realized that they had lost the ability to strike and had even lost the bravery to strike. As for the steward from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, for the first time, he felt an intense remorse for the arrangements concerning this time's entrance into Mount Han.

Why did they absolutely forbid the Orthodoxy cavalry to escort Chen Changsheng into the mountain?

If Mao Qiuyu or Linghai Zhiwang were here, would this demi-human expert still dare to act so wantonly?

Standing in the back of the crowd the entire time, Zhong Hui paled, but his eyes grew fierce and resolute. With a grunt, he gripped his sword.

Zhexiu was expressionless, but his knees bent, and he stared at Xiao De's throat like a ravenous wolf. His pupils instantly turned red as he prepared to transform.

Chen Changsheng stood at the very front, feeling most vividly the intensity of the pressure.

It could even be said that of the pressure being exuded by Xiao De, greater than half was being borne by him.

His expression did not change. In the howling mountain wind, he slowly raised his left hand.

His left hand held a dagger. This was his way of saying 'Please'.

The sword was called Stainless, the sheath was the Vault Sheath, and he was a sword hidden in its sheath. At any point, he was ready to reveal his true edge.

In truth, in both the Martial Exhibition in front of the Orthodox Academy and the battle on the Bridge of Helplessness against Xu Yourong, he had never completely displayed his strength. Now, when confronting an opponent on the same level as Wang Po, an expert at the top of the Proclamation of Liberation, it was impossible for him to hold anything back.

In the following battle, he did not know what the final conclusion would be. His defeat might be foreordained, but he wished to see if he could stab him once with his sword.

The sword sheath contained ten thousand swords—any one of these swords would do.

Alternatively, he wanted to see if he could chop at this person with a blade.

He had comprehended one hundred and eight blade techniques before the broken monolith—any blade would do.

Seeing Chen Changsheng's expression, Xiao De squinted his eyes even more. He was like a tiger dozing under the sun, yet the gaze peeking out of the crack in his eyes was even colder, the tawny light even more ruthless. To his surprise, he realized that this person was even stronger than in the rumors, almost as if he really could resist his strength for a moment.

"Please make way."

From the mountain path suddenly came a person.

This person was dressed in blue. His head was lowered and his voice was also very low. He gave off a very humble feeling, or he could also be described as a person that left no impression behind whatsoever.

The crowd gradually parted, opening a path for this abruptly appearing blue-clothed man.

"Thank you." His head lowered, the man continued to walk forward.

Only after they had opened the way did the crowd realize the oddness of the situation.

A moment ago, the Qi of the scene had been under the complete

control of the Qi being released by the demi-human expert and no one could move. Even the act of pulling out a sword had been impossible.

Why was it that when the blue-clothed man asked people to make way, they had all moved?

Zhong Hui stared at the back of the blue-clothed man, his eyes showing extremely complex emotions. Today, he had entered Mount Han, encountered Chen Changsheng, was forced to lower his head and bow, and then encountered so many powerful experts. He, who had made such incredible advances in the past year and had inevitably felt rather proud, suddenly seemed to realize something.

The blue-clothed man walked along the mountain path. He seemed to move very slowly, yet he did not need long before passing through the crowd.

He passed by Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu, brushed against Chen Changsheng's body, and then, he arrived before Xiao De.

Even now, his head was still lowered, his shoulders drooped. No one could see his face.

As he looked at the blue-clothed man's back, Chen Changsheng was quite shocked.

"Please make way."

The blue-clothed man said to Xiao De, his voice very low and his attitude very humble.

Xiao De did not let him by, his eyes narrowing even more.

He had once met a person that liked to wear blue. That person also liked to droop his shoulders.

If he had not met that person, he would have said that this blue-clothed man was that person.

Because in his eyes, this blue-clothed man was as terrifying as the other man.

However, this person's drooped shoulders seemed more similar to a speechless attitude towards the sky. It was an impoverishment that was filled with loftiness and preciousness, like someone doing accounts for a small store and yet grasping the mind of the world.

This blue-clothed man's drooped shoulders were his attitude towards the secular world. In his eyes, the world had nothing but dead people. His shoulders were drooped only so that he could pull his sword even faster.

Xiao De did not recognize this blue-clothed man, was not prepared to give way. His breathing suddenly became much more furious, like the howling of the mountain wind.



He released all his cultivation and Qi and the pressure grew even more terrifying.

The blue-clothed man didn't even seem to sense it. He continued to quietly stand in front of him, his head lowered and shoulders drooped.

The blue-clothed man did nothing. He just stood there in his ordinary and unremarkable fashion, yet it also seemed like he had disappeared.

This was truly terrifying.

After some time had passed, the blue-clothed man moved, making his way up the mountain path.

Xiao De's eyes were cold and grim. Two palms descended from the sky and met in front of him. Countless pieces of sand and stone were stirred up by the frenzied winds and bark was torn from trees as the palms swatted towards the blue-clothed man.

In an instant, the mountain path was covered in flying sand and rocks, the yellow wind filling the sky and causing everything to blur.

Suddenly, a sword glow illuminated the sandy wind and cut through the terrifying pressure.

# Chapter 560 - The Disappointed Executor

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A furious and unwilling howl roared out from the shattered wind and sand.

The wind calmed and the sand settled, and the mountain was once more clear and bright.

The demi-human expert of the Proclamation of Liberation had already disappeared, leaving behind only a puddle of blood on the ground.

The blue-clothed man still stood at his original position, still standing in his usual manner: a lowered head and drooped shoulders. However, the right hand extended from his sleeve was shaking somewhat.

There was no sword in his hands, and it almost seemed like the bright and beautiful, yet strange sword glow only existed in the imagination.

In reality, other than in special situations like the one in Xunyang City, very rarely would anyone living see his sword.

The mountain path was deathly quiet. The crowd stared at the blue-clothed man up the mountain path, their minds in utter shock as they all thought, just who is he? A hidden expert sent by the Orthodoxy to protect Chen Changsheng?

The demi-human expert that had lost in one exchange had not recognized the blue-clothed man.

No one recognized the blue-clothed man, no matter how experienced and knowledgeable they were.

Su Li had once very disdainfully evaluated this blue-clothed man, saying that any assassin with a name was not a good assassin.

But in truth, besides him or an important figure like Zhu Luo, who else could know just who this blue-clothed man was?

Chen Changsheng knew who he was.

In the ten thousand-li journey from the snowy plains of the demon lands to the south, this blue-clothed man had always been watching them from the shadows. At the time, he had believed that this blue-clothed man was waiting for the right opportunity to kill them, but later on, he realized that he had been protecting them. Finally, in that storm over Xunyang, the blue-clothed man had taken out his sword at last. With one strike, he had been able to reverse the entire situation.

Just like now.

He walked up to the blue-clothed man and said to his back, "Many thanks."

The blue-clothed man turned and emotionlessly replied, "Even

without me, he would not dare to kill you."

As he gazed at this ordinary face, Chen Changsheng suddenly realized that this face really was hard to remember. He had actually forgotten whether this face was similar to the one he had seen in Xunyang City.

"Even if he didn't dare to kill me, humiliating me is also not something I want."

"If this were the past, I would definitely have waited to see just what sort of methods you would use to deal with him."

The blue-clothed man glanced at the sword in Chen Changsheng's left hand. It was very obvious that he was sure Chen Changsheng was concealing some tricks.

"Why did you come and help me so early today?"

"I can't have anything happen to you."

"Why?"

The blue-clothed man looked into his eyes and said with great solemnity, "Because you are Big Brother's disciple."

Chen Changsheng stared back blankly for a few moment before he finally understood who this Big Brother was. Shaking his head,

he denied, "I'm not."

"You are Big Brother's disciple." The blue-clothed man cared nothing of his denial, declaring, "So you are Big Brother's disciple."

Chen Changsheng felt very helpless. He argued, "Even if Senior Su Li taught me swordplay, there's no reason for someone with your personality to care about my life and death."

"A dutiful son pays his father's debts, as does a disciple for his teacher."

The blue-clothed man said with all seriousness, "He ran off, so you should pay his debts in his place. I naturally can't have you die."

Chen Changsheng didn't understand, asking, "What debt?"

The blue-clothed man explained, "Back then, he brought us into the profession, but then he ran off. Now, he's run even farther away, so only you can come back and continue leading us."

Chen Changsheng stood in a daze for quite a while before saying, "I remember that there's also the second-ranked amongst your group?"

The blue-clothed man replied, "He went to chase after Big Brother."

At this time, a voice came from behind the two.

"That should be a woman, no?"

The person speaking was Tang Thirty-Six.

The blue-clothed man's expression turned somewhat sluggish. It seemed that he had not imagined that the secret of the second-ranked assassin in the world, the leader of the assassins, being a woman, could be found out through a single sentence.

Pleased, Tang Thirty-Six said, "Sir does not need to take care of me, nor does Sir need to praise me. Who am I?"

The blue-clothed man abruptly turned to Chen Changsheng and said, "He's very similar to another person."

Chen Changsheng had heard this many times. With deep sympathy, he nodded his head.

The blue-clothed man turned to Tang Thirty-Six and said, "I don't like that person, so you should stay far away from me, or else I'm afraid I won't be able to hold myself back and will kill you."

Tang Thirty-Six was given a scare, thinking, this guy's a madman! But when he remembered the elegant manner in which this person had used one strike to wound and force back Xiao De,

he still couldn't suppress his curiosity. He brought his shoulder close to Chen Changsheng and said, "Don't talk anymore about that nonsense, quickly introduce us."

"Tang Tang, from Wenshui." Then Chen Changsheng introduced, "This is Liu Qing."

The blue-clothed man was naturally the third-ranked assassin of the world, Liu Qing.

Upon hearing this very ordinary name, Tang Thirty-Six froze, finding the name rather familiar.

He suddenly remembered, then gave a shout at Liu Qing. He quickly extended both hands to grab Liu Qing's hands, repeatedly saying, "My idol, please leave me your contact details!"

What an assassin most feared was having one's hand in the grip of another's, and Liu Qing was no different. Moreover, he deeply disliked Tang Thirty-Six, so he naturally did not let him grab his hands.

Chen Changsheng suddenly asked, "Why do you like to droop your shoulders?"

Back in Xunyang City, Liu Qing could be said to be normal to the extreme, his temperament and figure both incredibly commonplace. However, he had never intentionally drooped his shoulders.

It must be known that to be deliberately and easily remembered by others was a quality assassins should shun the most.

Liu Qing replied, "I learned it from Wang Po. I realized that I could pull out a sword faster this way."

Chen Changsheng thought of that sword glow that had flashed through the sandy wind and realized that Liu Qing's sword truly was faster than back in Xunyang City by at least thirty percent.

A upper level Star Condensation assassin was already one of the world's most frightening existences. If his sword was faster by thirty percent, how much more frightening would he be?

No wonder the fifth-ranked demi-human expert of the Proclamation of Liberation was still no match for Liu Qing, despite the fact that he was not being ambushed.

The storm in Xunyang City had brought him, Wang Po, Liu Qing, and even Su Li many changes. Naturally, they had been good changes.

"Remember the words I gave you. He ran off, so you better not think about running away," Liu Qing gravely warned Chen Changsheng.

Tang Thirty-Six had been listening for quite some time, but now he could no longer hold back. He asked, "To have the future Pope



go and be the leader of an organization of assassins...are you sober?"

Liu Qing froze. He really had never thought of this problem. Only now, when Tang Thirty-Six asked if he was sober, did he finally wake up.

Yes, who would put down the position of ancestor of the Mount Li Sword Sect and go and be the head of the assassins?

And who would put down the position of Pope and go to be a chief of killers?

This was truly a fantastical way of thinking.

It turned out that in these past few years, he had been living such a fantasy.

Liu Qing's face seemed to darken. Then he lowered his head, turned, and headed up the mountain path.

He did not say a single word more to Chen Changsheng.

For some reason, his back seemed bleak and lonely as he made his way up the path, giving off an aura of sorrow.

"What's up with him?"

Tang Thirty-Six watched the figure of Liu Qing walking farther away and yelled, "I say...you still haven't left me your contact details, idol!"

Chen Changsheng asked, "Tell me...why did he appear on Mount Han?"

Tang Thirty-Six somewhat reluctantly tore his gaze away and turned to him, chiding, "You idiot, if he's coming to Mount Han at this time, he's naturally here to attend the Boiling Stone Summit."

Presently on this world, it was roughly only him and the Black Dragon that would use the word 'idiot' to describe Chen Changsheng.

"You're the idiot here," Zhexiu's voice came from the side. "An assassin participating in the Boiling Stone Summit is seeking his own death."

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## Chapter 561 - Seeing A Middle-Aged Scholar, The Sky Turns Dark

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Tang Thirty-Six came to his senses, thinking, this really is the case. Liu Qing has no invitation but still intruded upon Mount Han, so why hasn't the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets killed him?

Chen Changsheng couldn't understand it so he couldn't help but be worried—Su Li had left, as had the secretive assassin ranked second. When Liu Qing left, he really did seem like one of those wandering and homeless ghosts that walked the darkness, seeming like he could be swallowed by the light of the sun at any moment.

He knew that a person like Liu Qing had hands that were assuredly drenched in blood, so he really shouldn't be sympathizing with him. However, he had no means of controlling the inclination of his emotions. After all, in Xunyang City, they had fought side by side against the enemy, and the enemy they faced was one of the strongest in the world.

"Tell me, what sort of thing do you think an incredibly powerful assassin needs?"

Tang Thirty-Six suddenly said, "He's certainly made enough money. In my view, what he wants to retrieve is a certain way of life."

Puzzled, Chen Changsheng asked, "A way of life?"

"These assassins love to fight, love to kill, but they're not madmen. Thus, they love it when people purchase their skills and have them fight and kill. This way, they don't need to think about things like ethics and morality. They can make fighting and killing a daily job, and this is the sort of life they pursue."

"Just what do you want to say?"

"Liu Qing and that group of assassins can be considered a group of dragons with a head, now a group of wandering and homeless ghosts. They want someone to bring them back to the lives they used to live."

"And then?"

"Although I don't have that ability, I do have money...if they like this sort of life, I'll give it to them!"

"Just stop thinking about such nonsense," Chen Changsheng said very seriously to him.

Tang Thirty-Six carelessly spread out his hands, "I'm just randomly musing. Why so serious?"

Zhexiu expressionlessly replied, "He's been thinking about this for a long time, or else why did he so desperately ask for Liu Qing's contact details just now?"

Angry and ashamed, Tang Thirty-Six warned, "Without

evidence, don't talk nonsense, or else I'll put you to death."

Chen Changsheng shot him a glance.

Tang Thirty-Six quickly changed subjects. "Don't you feel that Xiao De's appearance just now was too sudden?"

They were forced to admit that Tang Thirty-Six had changed the subject very beautifully, because this really was a matter worth thinking about, with many points of suspicion.

Mount Han was a place under the control of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets. Xiao De could only have passed the mountain gate under the invitation of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets. In the end, however, he attempted to make things difficult for Chen Changsheng on the mountain path. Even if his strength was tyrannical and his manner arrogant, could he be unconcerned about angering the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets? Moreover, even if he had succeeded in humiliating Chen Changsheng, what benefits did that bring? Besides venting the fury in his heart, was that enough to cancel out the limitless harm that would be incurred by simultaneously offending both the Orthodoxy and the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets?

"Xiao De is different from ordinary demi-humans. For instance, he's completely different from our bear child. He's not one bit honest and straightforward. On the contrary, he's a deep and foresighted planner."

Tang Thirty-Six had brought up this matter, and the more he

thought about, the more he felt that something was wrong and his expression grew grave. "Although he has every excuse and reason to humiliate you, for him to take such a big risk, there must be some extremely great gain for doing it. But no matter how much I think about it, I can't think of a single good result.

"Unless there's somebody that could obtain enormous gain from all this which they can then turn into some other benefit to give him.

"For Chen Changsheng to be thoroughly humiliated, like being beaten into a pig, even stripped into a naked pig, who could obtain the greatest gain?

"Of course, it's not the Holy Maiden, nor is it Princess Luoluo... don't hit me, I'm speaking of a serious matter here...it should be those competitors. For the future Pope to lose so much face, the Li Palace would definitely seek revenge, but...if someone were to make trouble with this matter in the future, His Holiness would find it hard to speak up.

"If we say this is a plot, it's an extremely simple one, even child's play, but it could really cause you actual harm.

"Why? Because you're the future Pope, worshiped by all. The most hallowed, thus, also the easiest to sully.

"Zhexiu, don't look at me with those eyes, I don't have any other meaning behind those words.

"Chen Changsheng, see if my analysis has any basis."

In the following silence, Chen Changsheng and Zhexiu looked each other in the eyes, thinking, Tang Thirty-Six is truly worthy of being the Wenshui Tang clan's successor. In such a short amount of time, he was able to clearly dissect and analyze this sudden matter, parsing out the cause and effects in an extremely precise manner.

Yes, they already believed in Tang Thirty-Six's conjectures.

That demi-human expert had appeared too abruptly, and his actions were far too unreasonable, so there must have been some underlying reason.

The Divine Staff already lay in his hands, but if he wished to don the Divine Crown and become Pope, Chen Changsheng still needed to confront many trials.

Today was a seemingly ordinary, but actually highly dangerous trial.

Xiao De's objective was the two shores of the Red River, the throne of sovereignty over the demi-human domain.

Who could swallow such a monstrous price, invite Xiao De to risk the divine punishment of the Pope and act against Chen Changsheng?

To be more precise, who had the qualifications to promise Xiao De so much benefit in the future?

That person or those people, so vividly portrayed, were certainly the competitors for either the position of Pope or position of Emperor of the Great Zhou.

For example, the Tianhai clan in the faraway capital, or Linghai Zhiwang at the nearby base of the mountain.

Because of the rules set by the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, the Orthodoxy's powerful figures were unable to enter Mount Han. Now that they thought about it, this matter truly was rather interesting.

Because it was far too much of a coincidence.

It must be said that although a certain person's plans seemed coarse, they were really too coincidental in their clumsiness.

If not for the fact that Liu Qing had suddenly appeared at Mount Han for some reason, this plan really might have succeeded.

"Your luck is not bad," Tang Thirty-Six noted.

Zhexiu argued, "This has nothing to do with luck."

Yes, if not for the fact that they had journeyed together back



south for ten thousand li, fought together in Xunyang City's storm, and that Chen Changsheng had never abandoned Su Li to return on his own to the capital, how could he have been so fortunate just now?

People walked along the mountain path, those cultivators acquainted with each other grouped together and discussing the recent disturbance.

At the very front, Chen Changsheng was speaking to the steward from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets. "I have...somewhat of a friendship with that senior from just then, is it possible..."

The steward quietly said, "Of course it's no problem. The matter in Xunyang City is known by the world. Even if we didn't give Su Li face, we would still have to give Your Eminence face."

In truth, Chen Changsheng was clear that the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets was giving Senior Su Li face, it was just that he had broached the matter.

"Of course, he can't kill anybody in Mount Han. Even if he encounters a foe, he can only run away."

Finally, the steward added, "Or else even the faces of His Holiness and the Empress combined would be of no use here."

With this steward's promise, Chen Changsheng became much more relaxed.

He completely failed to expect that he would meet Liu Qing again so quickly.

Moreover, the current Liu Qing was in an extremely perilous situation.

The mountain path slightly curved. Directly in front of them was a clear stream. On the cliff at the other side of the stream, trees grew everywhere, covered in yellow leaves ranging from light to dark, so beautiful that their colors and shades all seemed to blur together. The trees were replete with fruits of all sorts, the burdened branches hanging like they could snap at any moment.

Near the stream, several hundred persimmon trees grew, their branches dense with persimmons. They seemed just like countless lanterns.

Liu Qing stood by the stream, staring in front of him at the innumerable yellow lanterns. His hand gripped his sword, his face was bloodlessly pale, and his breath was hurried and rushed. His two shoulders drooped extremely low, not because he could wield his sword even faster, but because they were on the verge of collapse, like some invisible mountain was resting on his body.

Countless fine streams of blood were seeping from his ears and the corners of his eyes.

His head was like one of those heavy fruits on those trees, ready to explode at any time because it was too ripe, or perhaps because

it was too heavy, it would snap the branch and roll off his neck.

Either resulted in death.

Liu Qing's right hand, holding the sword, was constantly shaking. He was almost at the point where he couldn't hold it anymore.

Even now, he still did not attack.

Because it was impossible for him to attack.

At the same time, he did not dare to attack this person.

Amongst the mountain of yellow leaves stood a middle-aged scholar.

His hands clasped behind his back, he gazed at those lantern-like persimmons, almost as if he was seeing if they were ripe or not.

A pendant was tied to his belt. If one carefully examined it, perhaps one would recognize that it was a seal.

There seemed nothing remarkable about this middle-aged scholar, but when Chen Changsheng's gaze fell upon his body, the sky above the mountains suddenly went dark.

Just who was he?

# Chapter 562 - At A Glance, Cold Snow Descends

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Chen Changsheng did not notice that the sky had suddenly turned dark.

Because he was currently in a state of shock.

Liu Qing was the third-ranked assassin in the world and he had been taught in swordplay by Su Li. His talent was incredibly high, his cultivation incredibly deep. Crucially, his will was tenaciously firm. Back in Xunyang City, he even dared to assassinate Zhu Luo, dared to stab at him with the sword. Why was it now that he was on the verge of death, yet still did not dare attack this middle-aged scholar?

Could it be that this middle-aged scholar was more powerful than Zhu Luo, more terrifying?

Zhu Luo was one of the Storms of the Eight Directions. Those on the continent stronger than him could be counted with two hands.

Was the middle-aged scholar Bie Yanghong? Nan Tie? Or perhaps he was the Elder of Heavenly Secrets?

No, this middle-aged scholar bore no similarity to any one of the Eight Storms.

"Could it be His Majesty the White Emperor?" Tang Thirty-Six said with an ugly expression.

In truth, there was no need to carefully think. The true answer was already obvious, it was just that nobody in these mountains could have expected it. There was simply no reason for such a powerful figure to appear at Mount Han, to appear here, to appear on this side.

By the stream, there were a few more people besides Liu Qing—Xiao De and ten-odd demi-human experts that seemed to be his subordinates.

The ten-odd demi-human experts were scattered on the grass by the stream, but Xiao De stood within the stream itself.

This demi-human expert who used his irritable appearance to conceal his inward arrogance, whose calm and composure exceeded the imagination, who was absolutely a realist, finally shed all his pretense when staring at the back of the middle-aged scholar before him. Vigilance and wariness were written all over his pale face, and his pupils glowing with tawny light reflected naught but despair.

His body bore a sword slash. Liu Qing, who had inflicted this wound upon him, was seeping blood from the corner of his eyes under the august pressure exerted by the middle-aged scholar, unable to even attack with his sword. Xiao De was keenly aware of just how vast and enormous the gap was between him and the middle-aged scholar, thus his despair.

But despair did not mean surrender. His body was being shrouded by an increasingly fierce will to fight.

He was truly worthy of being a true expert ranked fifth on the Proclamation of Liberation. On the mountain path, he had given a performance far inferior to his reputation, but now when confronted by the true shadow of death, when he faced off against this darkness that enveloped all of Mount Han, he displayed his fearless determination.

Xiao De's gaze rested on Liu Qing's right hand.

Liu Qing's hand held a sword and was shuddering and shaking as if lacking any strength.

Xiao De was waiting for an opportunity.

He knew that only by joining hands with this blue-clothed expert of the sword that had injured him could there be the slightest hope of seizing a nearly impossible chance to survive in front of this middle-aged scholar. This blue-clothed man was even less willing to give up. No matter how fiercely his hand holding the sword shuddered, there would come a point at which it would descend with smoothness and stability.

Regretfully, the middle-aged scholar did not give them such a chance.

Just as Liu Qing's hand gradually became steady and Xiao De's breathing gradually grew stronger, the middle-aged scholar turned around.

A moment before, the middle-aged scholar was holding his hands behind his back as he gazed at the lantern-like persimmons, like an official that had retired to his hometown.

In the next moment, the middle-aged scholar turned to them, his expression calm, returning to his identity as a peerless expert.

This middle-aged scholar's appearance was very difficult to describe with words, because even for two peak Star Condensation experts like Liu Qing and Xiao De, it felt like his face was shrouded in a faint layer of darkness, making it impossible to see clearly. As for Chen Changsheng and the others on the mountain path, they were utterly incapable of seeing this man's face.

They could only see that on this middle-aged man's face...was the world.

On the middle-aged scholar's face, bright words were written and drawn all over it were mountains and rivers. One moment, it was a boundless waste of yellow sand; the next, it was the surging and billowing sea. With the arching of a brow or the curve of a lip, all things of the world moved. The sights were all incomparably vivid, but they carried an aura of absolute cold stillness.

Because in the multitudinous sights of this world, not a single person could be found.



Not a single person.

Everyone was dead.

Upon seeing the middle-aged scholar's face, Liu Qing confirmed his speculations. His face became even paler and a trickle of blood seeped from the corner of his lips.

He had bitten his own tongue. Only this method would allow him to preserve his mind.

In the depths of Xiao De's eyes that were already beginning to wildly transform, a smear of blood appeared. This was a sign that he had used one of the secret blood techniques of the demi-humans!

Their conjectures had been verified, so even if they were to join hands, there would still not be even a chance of survival. They were forced to use their most secretive, most powerful techniques to put everything on the line against their opponent. Moreover, what filled them with sorrow was that even if they put everything on the line, it would still be impossible for them to continue living in this world. They could only stall for time so that the Saints would learn of what was happening by this little stream. Only this way could they die without complaint...fine, to be killed by such a powerful figure, no matter how they thought about it, they would be able to die without complaint.

The middle-aged scholar cared nothing for the thoughts of Liu

Qing and Xiao De. He didn't even glance at the two, even though they were both peak Star Condensation cultivators and were prepared to put their lives on the line.

His gaze rested on the distant mountain path, on Chen Changsheng's body.

With this single glance, snowflakes began to fall from the gloomy sky, falling on the mountain path and also on Chen Changsheng's body.

In the eerie light of this darkness, the snowflakes descending from the sky were exceptionally white, yet incredibly dangerous.

The temperature of the mountain path rapidly dropped, becoming extremely cold. Chen Changsheng and the others felt like their bodies had suddenly frozen stiff, and even their true essence was circulating through their meridians at a much slower speed. If they allowed this situation to continue, in a few breaths of time, they would find it a challenge to even walk, let alone battle.

After feeling such a horrifying danger, they naturally wanted to flee, but ahead and behind on the mountain path was snow and there was nowhere to run. This was because although each snowflake seemed gentle, in reality, each thin piece of snow contained an unimaginable amount of the force of the heavens and earth.

At this moment, a very secretive ripple of Qi appeared on the mountain path.

At some point, the steward of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had used his spiritual sense to touch the secret treasure hidden in his sleeve, preparing to send a warning towards the depths of Mount Han.

With a plop, the Qi sent out by the secret treasure was smashed to pieces by the descending snowflakes, and the right arm of the steward was immediately mashed into a pulp!

"There's an enemy!" Filled with despair and anger, the steward yelled out towards the depths of Mount Han.

Before his yell could travel far, it was sliced into pieces by the slowly descending snowflakes, drifting to the ground like dust.

Simultaneously, blood shot out from the steward's lips, instantly freezing into countless tiny beads of deep red and bouncing all over the mountain path.

The steward's body slowly toppled over, no longer breathing.

Cries of alarm arose from the mountain path.

The cultivators participating in the Boiling Stone Summit all turned in anger towards the middle-aged scholar by the stream.

They could not make out the middle-aged scholar's face, but they

could sense the middle-aged scholar's apathy and indifference.

To cause snow to fall at a glance, set up an array to entrap all the people on the mountain path, and then casually kill a steward of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets—to this person, all this really did seem like a trivial concern.

From the moment his gaze fell upon him, the middle-aged scholar had been staring at Chen Changsheng.

What did this mean?

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# Chapter 563 - With The Arch Of A Brow, The World Laments

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A shrill, frightened, and urgent voice called out, "Protect the lord!"

'Lord' was a term of respect, and the person that could be addressed so respectfully on this mountain path was naturally Chen Changsheng. Those cultivators were unable to deal with the snowflakes falling from the sky, but they still rushed to get in front of Chen Changsheng. Even Zhong Hui with his cold face rushed over with his sword. For a moment, the mountain path was filled with the sound of people flying through the wind...and then came the sounds of clothes and flesh being cut open!

The thin snowflakes were like the sharpest divine weapons, cutting open everything they encountered!

The mountain path was sprinkled with blood that froze into deep-red beads of ice that rolled all over the place.

The cultivators stood in front of Chen Changsheng, carrying both heavy and light injuries. No one had died, but their bravery was gradually fading away.

Just who was this middle-aged scholar? Just which Saint was he?

He was not a Saint.

He was the antithesis of all Saints.

With a pale face, Liu Qing thought of these words, then with a grunt, he wielded his sword and swiftly thrust!

A sword glow like a bolt of lightning rose up from the stream bank.

Xiao De had waited for this moment. He also began to move, even more swiftly than Liu Qing.

Veins bulged out on his face, reddish brown fur sprouted out of his skin, and his Qi became wilder. He rushed at the middle-aged scholar!

The middle-aged scholar finally turned his gaze away from Chen Changsheng. He turned to them and then arched his brow.

With the arch of his brows, the world shook.

The sword glow by the stream suddenly vanished. With an ear-aching sound, the sword in Liu Qing's hand was chopped in half.

Liu Qing himself fell on the grass, a bloody line appearing on his wrist from which blood incessantly shot out. He was in an absolutely wretched state.

Xiao De was even worse off. Before he had been able to get out of

the stream, he had been slapped into the water by the might of the world.

With a slap, he fell down on one knee, water splashing everywhere, blood splashing everywhere!

His wild metamorphosis and the blood technique meant his body was harder than steel, but with this kneel, his kneecap was smashed into a fine powder!

But he had only fallen down on one knee, not completely kneeled in the water. This demi-human expert grit his teeth and, with a frenzied howl, did his utmost to continue forward!

Liu Qing was the same. One side spewing blood, one side holding a shattered sword, he continued thrusting forward. Moreover, at some point, his left hand had come to grip the severed part of the sword!

The middle-aged scholar was far too powerful. Even when they discarded any grudges and acted together, it was still impossible for them to win.

But they could not just stop, they could not just lie down or kneel.

Because before demons, humans and demi-humans would never surrender!

Seeing these two rushing over with wounded bodies, grimly resolved to die, the middle-aged scholar revealed the hint of a smile on his lips.

As he smiled, the mountains and rivers became bright and beautiful, but still silent and clear, lonely and cold, because there were no humans amongst these mountains and rivers, and also no demi-humans.

Before him, all humans and demi-humans must die.

The deeper the smile on the middle-aged scholar's face, the deeper the wounds became on Liu Qing and Xiao De's bodies, all the way until one could see the dense white bone!

With two plops, Liu Qing and Xiao De finally collapsed amidst the persimmon trees in flowers of blood, ultimately unable to reach the middle-aged scholar.

Liu Qing closed his mouth, his face pale and not saying a word. As an assassin, since he had to die, he should die quietly.

On the other hand, Xiao De howled in rage like a wounded beast, pained and unwilling.

Those ten-odd demi-human subordinates by the stream saw this scene and were finally able to overcome the fears in the deepest depths of their hearts. Taking up their weapons, they rushed towards the middle-aged scholar.



Especially that demi-human expert closest to the forest. Resigning himself to death, he used the blood technique and his body instantly grew massive. One could faintly see his original form of an elephant. With a low and furious bellow, he tossed up the gravel and cold water as he charged towards the middle-aged scholar.

Seemingly bored, the middle-aged scholar casually waved his sleeve.

Just like that, the elephant tribe expert's heavy body was sent flying into the sky.

As it flew through the sky, the elephant expert's body was constantly cut apart, shooting out innumerable arrows of blood. Ultimately, as several dozen chunks of flesh, it splashed in the water downstream.

As for the rest of the demi-human experts, their situation was even more terrible. Severed hands, severed arms, severed feet, and there were even some that were severed at the waist, but for the moment, they were not allowed to die.

The stream bank was littered with blood and organs and despairing and dismal howls of pain!

Xiao De's eyes were brimming with rage. Staring at the middle-aged scholar, he hissed, "I'm going to kill you!"

Previously on the mountain path, he had said that he wanted to kill Chen Changsheng. That had just been an agreed-upon method, but because he really did possess that ability, those words back then had possessed a chilling effect.

Now when he said that he wanted to kill the middle-aged scholar, it was more like the helpless lament of a child, pitiable and sympathetic.

The middle-aged scholar paid no attention to his anguished cries.

It didn't matter if it was the fifth-ranked expert of the Proclamation of Liberation or the third-ranked assassin of the world—to him, they were all meaningless things, not even worth the slightest bit of his mind or time.

His gaze once more fell upon the mountain, once more fell upon Chen Changsheng.

The mountains and rivers on his face gradually dispersed, revealing a face that may or may not have been the original one.

This face was very delicate and handsome. It seemed like it had experienced great changes, like a green plum that had just sprouted, yet also like the ancient Buddha of the legendary Sangharama Temple.

He stood on a ground splattered with blood and flesh, stood

amongst cries of boundless pain, staring at Chen Changsheng, his expression calm and apathetic, and also smiling.

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Snowflakes gently drifted down, the cold of the mountain path biting to the bone.

Everyone felt this way.

All this had happened too quickly. They had turned the mountain path, seen the middle-aged scholar in the forest across the stream, and when he turned around, the steward from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets died, Liu Qing and Xiao De were heavily wounded and on the verge of death, and ten-odd demi-human experts had either died miserable deaths or were living lives worse than death. All in all, only a few seconds had elapsed.

No one, whether it was Chen Changsheng, Zhexiu, or Tang Thirty-Six, had time to do anything. Of course, even if they could do something, it would be pointless.

The middle-aged scholar was far too terrifying.

Ever since Chen Changsheng had arrived at the capital from Xining, he had encountered a few supreme experts, but no matter if it was Zhu Luo, Guan Xingke, or Bie Yanghong of the Storms of

the Eight Directions, all of them were weaker than this middle-aged scholar. Even the Holy Maiden of the south he had met in Xunyang City seemed to be a level below this scholar.

Could the Pope be stronger than this middle-aged scholar?

Chen Changsheng had only seen the vast sea of stars in the Pope's eyes and had never seen the Pope personally strike, so it was impossible to answer this question.

If he really had to find someone in his life of cultivation that was on par cultivation-wise with this middle-aged scholar, then it could only be Su Li.

Moreover, this would have to be Su Li in his prime, at his peak condition.

Back then on the snowy plains of the land of demons, the feeling he had when Su Li had pulled the Heaven Shrouding Sword from the Yellow Paper Umbrella and cleaved open a vast several-hundred li path heading south was somewhat similar to the feeling he had now.

Just who was this middle-aged man?

Chen Changsheng suddenly recalled, when he had left the Garden of Zhou and returned the Yellow Paper Umbrella to Su Li, he had once seen that darkness far in the distance.

That darkness that emerged from Xuelao City and enveloped half the sky.

At present, Mount Han was being shrouded by a similar darkness.

His face instantly became pale beyond compare.

# Chapter 564 - What Is Meant By Heavenly Secrets?

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At the summit of Mount Han sat a blue-green lake, serene and of unknown depth. Although it was surrounded by cold, the lake's surface still emitted a steaming fog.

By the lake shore and on the cliffs, scattered in the grass, were stones of all sizes. Of course, even more stones were immersed in the lake. Some were resting on the lake bed while others revealed their sharp corners to the sky. Many dragon cranes that were flying south to spend the summer were standing on these stones, contentedly preening their feathers.

This lake was the Heaven Lake, the congregation of many hot springs. Those stones were the Heavenstones. In time immemorial, they had descended from the heavens, and although they were not the same as the monoliths within the Mausoleum of Books, received the ardent worship of generations upon generations. They lived much more at ease and lived more wild and interesting lives.

An old man sat on a stone on the lake shore, his eyes closed, almost like he was basking in the sun.

In the high pavilion behind the stone, there were several hundred attendants and subordinates, but not a single sound came from it.

The Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had always been the continent's

most famous and yet most enigmatic location.

This place promulgated all sort of rankings and proclamations and was regarded as the most equitable and impartial. It possessed enormous authority and no one dared to question it. It had a grandiose reputation in the world and was engaged in every sort of business, its feelers extending to every place. Even amongst the common people, it would be nigh impossible to find one that did not know the name of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets. Yet no one knew where the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets was actually located.

But to the powerful figures on the upper layer of the cultivating world, the location of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had never been a secret.

On the continent, the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets owned countless properties, innumerable mansions, and even twenty or so famous mountains and caves.

Wherever the Elder of Heavenly Secrets lived, there was the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets.

The old man by the lake was the Elder of Heavenly Secrets.

When he closed his eyes in rest, all the people in Mount Han would naturally have to maintain their silence.

Suddenly, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets opened his eyes.

His two eyes, weathered by time and brimming with intelligence, were permeated with shock. He was the head of the Storms of the Eight Directions, his cultivation masterly beyond description. Moreover, he was particularly skilled at calculation. Just what matter in this world could escape his eyes? What had caused even him to be shocked?

Without delay, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets raised his right hand and pointed at the steam rising from the Heaven Lake.

A faint but tenacious strand of Qi emerged from his fingertip, instantly throwing the fog of steam into turmoil.

In the surging fog, many pictures could faintly be seen.

When those pictures were reflected in his eyes, they splintered into countless fragments of thoughts.

"Just what is happening?"

"Why did you leave Xuelao City and venture into Mount Han?"

"And just how did you hide from my eyes? Black Robe...was it you?"

"The demons naturally wish to find a way to shatter the confluence of the north and south, but there's no reason for you to personally come, much less coming here. What use is there in doing this?"



"A thousand years ago, you were severely wounded by Zhou Dufu, after which you holed yourself up in Xuelao City, recovering from your wounds. Even when Black Robe planned to surround and kill Su Li, you only assisted through the night sky, not daring to take even half a step out of Xuelao City. Wasn't it because you were afraid that Su Li might suddenly break out and injure you? So why today did you dare leave Xuelao City?"

"There can be only two reasons that would make you leave Xuelao City: the first is that your injuries are healed; the second is that you found a way to heal those past injuries of yours."

"That method is here in Mount Han?"

"Who is it?"

"Is it him?"

"What treasure does he hold on him? Or is that you just want to kill him?"

"Why did Tianhai want me to examine him? Is there some connection between you and Tianhai?"

"Just what is it...that not even I can see through it?"

"Chen Changsheng, just what sort of person are you?"

"If you wanted to kill Chen Changsheng, why didn't you act while he was en route, instead of coming to Mount Han? I understand—it was because Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang accompanied him the entire way, and there was even a chance that the Pope had allowed them to bring valued treasures of the Orthodoxy. You were worried that you would be delayed by them...you were worried that this was a plot that we had concocted."

"After that matter, whether it was you or us, anything we saw was like a plot."

"So you chose to come to Mount Han to kill Chen Changsheng. As long as you could hide from me, it was fine."

"Yet you did not expect that Liu Qing and Xiao De would reveal you so soon and struggle with you for so much time."

"Then, now it is my turn to see how I should make my choice."

Countless thoughts appeared in the mind of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, countless calculations were carried out, and countless fine threads of Qi formed pictures in his sea of consciousness.

A flash of lightning illuminated a cloud, a strand of morning fog scattered in the light. In an extremely brief span of time, he had thought of so many things.

Simultaneously, his finger trembled in the wind, tearing countless paths through the steam.

An indescribably powerful Qi enveloped the entire Heaven Lake.

Countless stones flew up from the grass, flew up from the cliffs, flew up from the lake, and soared into the sky.

Lake water splashed down, grass and mud streamed down, and the lake was greatly unsettled.

From the summit of Mount Han to the distant sky above, countless stones hovered in the air.

Every one of these stones was a black point, and between each point was an invisible line. Countless invisible lines formed a net.

A giant net formed from these stones enveloped the five-hundred li circumference around Mount Han.

The middle-aged scholar lay within.

However, the concern in the eyes of Elder of Heavenly Secrets was not reduced. On the contrary, it deepened.

Even now, he still could not calculate just what was on Chen Changsheng's person that could make this person leave the distant Xuelao City and venture here.

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Snowflakes slowly fell over the mountain path, gloomy clouds covered the peaks and it seemed like night. From extremely far away came the sound of tearing.

Chen Changsheng did not know that this was the sound of innumerable Heavenstones floating into the air and turning all of Mount Han into a cage.

His mind was completely focused on the middle-aged scholar on the other side of the stream.

Then, his gaze met the middle-aged scholar's gaze.

It was like a sudden clap of thunder booming through his mind. His face grew even paler, utterly devoid of any blood.

The snow could drown out any color. Only blood could stand out.

He had already guessed at who this middle-aged scholar was. Now, he understood the message communicated by the scholar's gaze and knew his reason for coming.

The end he would soon confront would not be death, but an end

even more frightening than death.

The ending he most feared ever since that night many years ago in the old temple.

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Gloomy clouds gathered around the mountains, ushering in the darkness.

Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang sensed this at the same time. They raised their heads towards the depths of the mountains, their expressions instantly growing incomparably grave.

"Allowing matters to develop too far is definitely impermissible."

Mao Qiuyu withdrew his gaze and stared at Linghai Zhiwang, his gaze incredibly sharp. His two sleeves moved despite the lack of breeze, his hand grasping something within his sleeve.

Linghai Zhiwang had an abnormally ugly expression. With a groan, he said, "It has nothing to do with me!"

The strange phenomena in Mount Han truly had nothing to do with Linghai Zhiwang. Just like Chen Changsheng and the others had speculated, as one of the most powerful competitors for the

position of next Pope, Linghai Zhiwang and some other people behind the scenes truly had arranged for Xiao De to make trouble on the mountain path. However, how could he have invited that darkness?

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# Chapter 565 - The Entire World Is Shocked

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Darkness obscured the sky. Just what were the people in the mountains facing? What should they do next?

Mao Qiuyu did not hesitate. His sleeves fluttering, he instantly flew several li as he rushed towards the mountain path. His face ashen, Linghai Zhiwang transformed into a streak of light and followed. With a flip of his right hand, he gripped a pestle dazzling with light.

Precisely according to the calculations of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, these two Prefects of the Orthodoxy, following the Pope's order to protect Chen Changsheng, really were carrying the precious treasures of the Orthodoxy!

Yet they were unable to step onto the mountain path. They were forced to stop in front of the mountain gate of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets.

It wasn't because of that darkness, but because high up in the sky above the mountains, countless black stones had appeared.

The stones formed a dense net over the sky, enveloping all of Mount Han in an extremely powerful Qi.

These stones were not ordinary stones, they were stones that shared the same source as the Heavenly Tome Monoliths: the Heavenstones!

These Heavenstones were formed into an extremely terrifying array. Even a supreme expert of the Divine Domain would find it impossible to shatter this Heavenstone array in a short time. Although they were powerful and were also carrying the treasures of the Orthodoxy, they had no means of breaking through and entering Mount Han.

Then what about the people within Mount Han...what about him?

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Heavenstones rose up from the Heaven Lake, from the lake shore, from the grass, from the finger of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets sat by the lake shore, the wrinkles on his face instantly multiplying, making him seem even more elderly. However, his finger was still firm and stable, incessantly writing something on the steam. He was calculating and simultaneously laying down the array. As he did so, his body exuded an incredibly powerful Qi.

Several thousand Heavenstones flew to various places in the mountain range. Hovering in the air against the black canvas of the night, they seemed like stars as they locked down a circle of five hundred li in radius.



This place was Mount Han, this place was his.

Even though the middle-aged scholar that had come to Mount Han was the strongest opponent he had faced in his one thousand years of cultivation, he still had the confidence to fight with him.

The Heavenstones floating in the night sky formed a net. The very center of this net of stones was the place where the mountain path turned, by the stream, in front of the persimmon trees.

Right above the middle-aged scholar's head.

The middle-aged scholar raised his head. Despite seeing dozens of Heavenstones everywhere he looked, his expression remained apathetic, not the slightest bit moved.

On the distant lake shore at the summit of Mount Han, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets swayed for a moment. The wrinkles on his face did not increase but seemed to deepen.

The middle-aged scholar gazed at the peak and apathetically said, "Heavenly Secrets, you wish to imprison me with such a simple and crude array?"

His voice was like a clap of thunder, crashing through the mountains.

The cultivators standing guard in front of Chen Changsheng all had their seas of consciousness shaken. Some cultivators who were slightly weaker in cultivation even released their swords and covered their ears in pain.

All these scenes faintly appeared in the steam over the lake at the summit.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets gazed into the steam and said, "I can't hold you for a life, but I only need to hold you for a moment."

The middle-aged scholar smiled, questioning, "Then the lives of these juniors, they aren't your concern?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets replied, "As you don't even care for your own life, just whose life could I possibly concern myself about?"

These two supreme experts were separated by at least a hundred li, but they were talking as if they were standing right across from each other.

Upon hearing this simple conversation, those human cultivators and demi-human experts that had initially gained some hope from hearing the voice of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets were instantly plunged back into despair.

The people of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets that were seated cross-legged in the pavilion by the lake shore strengthening the

array all revealed disturbed expressions, but none of them could say anything.

If the Elder of Heavenly Secrets used all of his strength, even he could not rescue all the people by the stream and on the mountain path, but perhaps he would be able to save some of them.

But if he did so, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets would be incapable of supporting the Heavenstone array that sealed the five hundred li circle around Mount Han.

Those people that entered Mount Han were all very important, the future of humanity. And yet, if he could hold this middle-aged scholar in Mount Han for a little while longer so that the experts of the human world could rush over and then work together to kill him, then...the humans would assuredly welcome an incomparably sublime future.

In the brief span of time after the Elder of Heavenly Secrets realized the middle-aged scholar's presence, he had performed forty-odd calculations and ultimately made his choice.

If the deaths of those people could be exchanged for the death of the human world's most terrifying enemy, they would be worthy deaths.

Even if the future Pope was amongst these people.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets was confident that if those people

knew the identity of this middle-aged scholar, they would make the same choice as he did.

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The Ten Thousand Years Pavilion was a famous sight of Xiling and possessed an expansive library. A scribe was standing by a bookshelf, reading a book in his hands. This person was dressed in a rather ordinary gown. The only peculiarity on his person was the red flower tied to his little finger. This flower was extraordinarily red. [It was a very beautiful red](#), and very special, not at all like a red you might see anywhere else. It had a beauty of some other style.

(TN: Bie Yanghong literally translates to 'Another Style of Red'.)

The scribe's expression was very calm, all his focus seemingly placed on the book before him. However, the light trembling of the red flower on his finger indicated that his current mood was not at all what he represented. Perhaps it was because the sounds of cursing could occasionally be heard from outside the pavilion. The Ten Thousand Years Pavilion was a famous spot known for its tranquility—who would dare shout curses outside of it? And who would dare curse at this scribe?

The person cursing outside was an old Daoist nun, the horsetail whisk in her hand still half bald. It was actually Wuqiong Bi, who had been driven out of the capital by the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Listening to the curses from outside, the scribe also found it hard to maintain his composure. His brow creased deeper and deeper until finally, he sighed and prepared to speak. It was just then that a faint ripple suddenly appeared in the sky to the east of the Ten Thousand Years Pavilion.

The scribe's expression subtly shifted. In a flash, his body vanished from the bookshelf, in the next moment appearing outside the pavilion. Upon seeing the scribe finally appear, the old Daoist nun became inwardly rather pleased, but her face was brimming with loathing. Looking at him, she admonished, "You don't care about your son, don't tell me you also don't care about your wife!"

The scribe completely ignored her, his gaze still focused on the blue sky to the northeast, his complexion very unsightly.

Infuriated, the old Daoist nun made to grab at him.

With a cold harrumph, the scribe angrily brushed away her sleeve, then the tip of his foot lightly pressed on a lotus in the lotus pond in front of the pavilion. His body vanished into the sky, no longer to be found.

The old Daoist nun heavily fell against the ground, her cheeks red and swollen.

She covered her face in astonishment. Once she had gotten married, she had never received such treatment.

Just as she was prepared to unleash some curses, she finally sensed the peculiarity from the sky. Her face paled somewhat and her heart began to beat with fear.

At this moment, she only hoped that brushing away her sleeve did not delay her husband even a second.

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The Myriad Willows Garden outside Hanqiu City was still scorched earth. Although quite some time had passed, no tender buds were sprouting from the ground.

Zhu Luo stood by the once-lake shore, gazing at the ruined scenery in silence.

In these past few days, he had devoted his time to dealing with the matters of the Zhu clan and the Emotion-Severing Sect. At the same time, he was also waiting for the day that Wang Po would return to Tianliang County. As a result, his mind was somewhat weary.

A man wearing a bamboo hat stood at his side. He was precisely Guan Xingke of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

Suddenly, a black grain of ash fell on the fringe of his hat. Guan Xingke seemed to sense something and looked towards the eastern

horizon. He saw that several thousand li away, the sea of clouds had dimmed somewhat.

"Something's happened."

"You go."

"Okay."

# Chapter 566 - There Is A Fish In Mount Han

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Countless footprints suddenly appeared like stars on the scorched earth of the Myriad Willows Garden.

Guan Xingke's figure had already vanished, perhaps already departed from Tianliang County.

Zhu Luo stared into the distance, his face overcome with complex emotions.

He had actually gone to Mount Han?

In the past, he would certainly have hurried together with Guan Xingke to Mount Han.

Just like the other experts of the continent that had just received the summons from the Elder of Heavenly Secrets.

But now, he was old, wounded, simply incapable of hurrying over.

Suddenly, he felt a hint of regret towards that matter from last year in Xunyang City.

If he had not gone to kill Su Li, he would have had the chance today to kill that person.



Ah, this was truly the thing he should have done!

Even if he would die, he would still have done it!

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The figures swiftly flying towards Mount Han were not many, but they were all supreme experts of the human world.

On the distant shores of the Red River, the majestic and awe-inspiring White Emperor City was still at peace, everything carrying on just as normal. The only strange feature was that white cloud hanging over the city walls.

In the Imperial Palace, the summer light shone over the Dew Platform. In the daylight, those Night Pearls were still as dazzlingly radiant as ever.

The Tianhai Divine Empress stood in this light, gazing into the distance, her expression indifferent, her thoughts inscrutable.

In the serene palace in the deepest depths of the Li Palace, the Pope quietly gazed at the Green Leaf before him, his thoughts also inscrutable.

In the snowy plains to the north of Mount Han, even though it

was the height of summer, the frigid wind still chilled to the bone and the blizzards blew without end.

A man stood in the blizzard. If one did not walk up close, it would simply be impossible to realize his existence.

Because he was dressed in white all over, from his hair to his clothes, all white to the extreme.

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In Mount Han, the middle-aged scholar gazed at those Heavenstones floating in the sky. He fell silent, no longer conversing with the Elder of Heavenly Secrets at the summit.

Could this also be a plot laid down by the humans and demi-humans?

The stones gently hovered in the sky.

Several dozen stones, carrying moss, water, and gravel, floated around his body, creating a rather odd scene.

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The middle-aged scholar knew what the Elder of Heavenly Secrets wanted to do.

He believed that this was not a plot of the humans, because even as late as last night, neither the Military Advisor nor even he himself could have known that he would appear in Mount Han today.

After he suffered defeat on the Central Plains all those many years ago, he returned to Xuelao City and did not emerge again for what was now one thousand years.

A powerful figure on his level had grasp of his own fate. His words, actions and thoughts all coincided with the Heavenly Dao, making it very difficult for him to be figured into a plot.

White Emperor City was too far and he was also extremely certain that Tianhai and the Pope were both in the capital.

But if he really was delayed for too long in Mount Han by this Heavenstone array, the situation really might change.

He had never liked change, because change was often troublesome.

Now, it was his turn to make a choice.

Should he take advantage of the fact that no change had occurred yet to use his full strength to shatter the array and leave Mount

Han, returning to his territory? Or should he pause for a little while longer and first accomplish that task?

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets had chosen to sacrifice those human cultivators and demi-human experts on the mountain path and by the stream in order to imprison him within Mount Han. He had made this decision very quickly, but presumably, there had been some hesitation.

To him, however, there was no need to hesitate at this moment, or even a need to choose.

Because in his view, to accomplish this task would not take too long.

In his eyes, that youth was truly not much different from an ant, even if this youth was a cultivating genius who had shocked the entire continent.

He no longer paid any attention to those Heavenstones that broke through the wind and snow, withdrawing his gaze back to the mountain path.

Chen Changsheng and the other human cultivators were on the mountain path.

He was very calm, a nigh intangible smile still hanging about his lips.

As the gaze of the middle-aged scholar once more descended, the people on the mountain path were plunged into despair.

In the grass by the stream, Liu Qing also despaired.

Even Zhexiu and Tang Thirty-Six had given up hope.

Chen Changsheng had not. As he looked back at the smiling and silent middle-aged scholar, he inexplicably thought of a person he really shouldn't have been thinking about at this moment.

The middle-aged woman that had once sat across from him in the Hundred Herb Garden, drinking tea.

He didn't know whether or not it was because both of them did not speak, but he felt that the middle-aged scholar and the middle-aged woman were somewhat similar.

Of course, he knew that he was definitely mistaken.

Because he knew who this middle-aged scholar was.

He knew what he had come to do.

On that night when he was ten years old, his senior brother had fanned himself for the entire night. Later on, his senior said to him that only a Saint would be able to resist the greed and longing for his flesh.

In the following years, he paid a great deal of attention to hiding his body's peculiarity until the Garden of Zhou, when that aroma was smelled by the Great Peng and Nanke.

The middle-aged scholar was Nanke's father, so perhaps he had found out from her.

And he was naturally no Saint.

He was a fiend.

Chen Changsheng felt that in this middle-aged scholar's gaze, he was naked, lying on a moist chopping board, his belly already sliced open and his entire body stained with blood.

He was not afraid, but he was truly afraid of this sort of feeling.

He did not wish to be a piece of fish to be eaten.

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# Chapter 567 - Escaping Into The Depths Of Mount Han

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When confronting what was possibly the world's most powerful existence, the most miserable end, Chen Changsheng was afraid, nervous, uneasy...but he did not despair.

He had his fill of despair when he was ten, had gotten used to it and knew it was of no use.

He stared at the middle-aged scholar standing by the distant stream while in his right sleeve, his hand gripped a button.

The middle-aged scholar seemed to sense something and his gaze instantly grew sharper, cold and sharp like a sword. A terrifying Qi dispersed into the surrounding wilderness.

With a boom, the stones in the air were shaken apart by an earthquake.

The snowstorm suddenly intensified and the mountain path grew even colder. With many clatters, the weapons of many cultivators fell to the ground.

Chen Changsheng felt that his right hand was not quite listening to him, almost as if it really was frozen. He actually could not break the button in his palm!

Relying on the steady flow of energy from the array within Mount Han, the several hundred Heavenstones once more descended.

The middle-aged scholar raised his right hand and seemed to flick his finger at the distant mountain path.

An invisible Qi passed through the Heavenstones and reached the mountain path.

Chen Changsheng's right hand had been locked down by the middle-aged scholar's Qi, but his left hand could still move.

With a burst of metal screeching, the metal ball flying out of his sheath unfurled with unimaginable speed.

An old umbrella appeared in Chen Changsheng's left hand.

The Yellow Paper Umbrella.

A rumble resonated through the mountain path. The stream water surged, splashing and turning into countless pieces of snow.

The Qi struck against the surface of the Yellow Paper Umbrella.

An unimaginably berserk power traveled down the Yellow Paper Umbrella and transferred to Chen Changsheng's body.



Chen Changsheng's body was like a small rock struck by a metal hammer. It whistled through the air then heavily struck the firm cliff face!

Dust billowed into the air and then settled back down.

The clear outline of a human could be seen on the cliff face, as well as some stone fragments, but no trace of Chen Changsheng could be seen.

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The reason Chen Changsheng was able to escape the middle-aged scholar's Qi lock and use some unfathomable method to vanish was naturally the button that he had been gripping in his palm the entire time.

This was no ordinary button—it was the Thousand Li Button.

Back then, when Luoluo had encountered the demon assassin in the Orthodox Academy, she had once used the Thousand Li Button but had been blocked by the Heavenly Net.

The Heavenly Net was the weapon of the Demon Lord. Although its might was no longer what it once was, it was still enough to restrain the Thousand Li Button.

Now, the Heavenly Net was in the hands of the Great Zhou Imperial Court.

Today in Mount Han, Chen Changsheng had encountered the master of the Heavenly Net. He had used the Thousand Li Button and was not blocked by the Heavenly Net. Instead, he was blocked by a great stone.

At this point, he should have already left the range of Mount Han and rendezvoused with Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang at the base of the mountain, yet he still remained within the mountain range.

The several thousand stones floating in the sky had sealed off all of Mount Han, so he could not leave.

A great boulder like a small mountain sat across the mountain path, barring the way.

Chen Changsheng's face was pale beyond belief. The internal injuries in his body exploded, causing him to spit blood onto the stone.

The distant finger of the middle-aged scholar actually faintly surpassed Zhu Luo's sword that he had faced in Xunyang City.

If not for the Yellow Paper Umbrella, he would certainly be dead.

Even so, a hole had appeared on the canvas of the Yellow Paper Umbrella.

Chen Changsheng examined the bloodstain on the stone. Even after confirming that there was no scent, he still could not relax. He took up some dust and covered the stain, then rushed up the mountain path.

In past battles, he very rarely fled, much less abandoned his companions. However, today was different. There was simply no possibility of defeating, or even somewhat resisting, the middle-aged scholar. Moreover, he was keenly aware that the middle-aged scholar's objective was him, so the farther he escaped, the safer his companions were.

So he escaped, escaped with abnormal resolve.

He used the Blazing Sword, ignited his true essence almost without heed for his life, and ran with maddening speed towards the summit of Mount Han.

Amidst the mountains shrouded in darkness, a dragon of dust rose up. In an instant, he was only several li away from the peak.

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The stream bank and mountain were both quiet.

The crowd watched as the dust subsided, and stared in shock at the marks left by the collision. Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu did not look, maintaining their gazes on the middle-aged scholar by the stream. Even when their faces were pale, their hearts filled with fear, and they knew that they would die in the next moment, they still inflexibly stared.

The middle-aged scholar moved, heading upstream.

The Heavenstone array of Mount Han responded. Several hundred Heavenstones continued to encircle him as they followed.

Zhexiu and Tang Thirty-Six simultaneously moved, rushing towards the middle-aged scholar. They naturally knew that they were no match for the middle-aged scholar, but it was obvious that he had come for Chen Changsheng. Now, he was assuredly heading off in pursuit of Chen Changsheng, so even if they could only delay for a single moment, it was still one moment...

They could not delay the middle-aged scholar, but they did not die.

He was far away from Xuelao City and had come to the human world, so the middle-aged scholar's time was very precious, at least more precious than their lives, so he paid the two no attention.

It was utterly impossible for Zhexiu and Tang Thirty-Six to catch up to the middle-aged scholar's footsteps.

The scholar seemed to move very slowly, but he needed only an instant to reach the distant peak.

Most horrifyingly, he had actually brought those several hundred Heavenstones with him.

Those Heavenstones possessed an unimaginable weight, all of which now rested on the scholar's body, but they could not delay his steps for even a few moments.

A heavy, thunderous rumbling resounded through the mountain range. Countless cliffs collapsed and mountain paths were severed.

This scene was very strange, very shocking, brimming with power and terror.

With the departure of the middle-aged scholar and the Heavenstones, the snowstorm and pressure over the stream and mountain path instantly vanished.

With a boom, the stream water was jolted several hundred zhang into the air and then fell back down like rain.

The cliffs of the mountain path and the grass fiercely shook, with muffled booms ringing out nonstop.

The yellow, lantern-like persimmons on the trees fell one by one.

Whether ripe or unripe, they all fell to the ground and were pulped into paste.

Just like the corpses and flesh by the stream bank.

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The massive boulder was still quietly floating there. It was so close to the ground that if one drew near, it seemed like a small mountain.

Standing on the cliff opposite, the middle-aged scholar extended his hand and grabbed at it from a distance. The mountainous boulder flew over and fell into his hand.

Compared to this massive boulder, he seemed very insignificant, even almost completely obscured.

A mountain falling into his hand—this sounded somewhat inappropriate, but it truly occurred.

A cold wind suddenly gusted through the night-shrouded cliffs, blowing away the dust on the stone and revealing the still-moist bloodstain.

The middle-aged scholar lowered his head and sniffed. His

expression was still indifferent, but he slowly closed his eyes as if intoxicated.

"My child really was not wrong."

The middle-aged scholar opened his eyes and gazed at the bloodstain on the stone. He revealed a faint smile, seeming very satisfied.

The mountains and rivers on his face became even more bright and beautiful, seemed even more full of vitality.

In the next moment, the mountains and rivers dimmed once more.

Because he had arched his brows.

It was still not fully ripe, but he could still use it.

His hidden injury left from the past could be completely cured.

He could finally put down this heavy burden and continue moving forward to the ultimate realm of Grand Liberation.

This thought and the thought of these one thousand long and endless years made even someone like him sigh with emotion.

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# Chapter 568 - There Is A Tourist On The Mountain

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Chen Changsheng madly ran the entire way, his boots and the mountain crumbling together as he ran in a cloud of a dust. In a few moments, he had already run halfway up the mountain.

He did not know much farther it would be until he reached the Heaven Lake and the summit of Mount Han, only that he should make use of his time—that the farther he ran, the better.

But soon after, he stopped, because he sensed that something was wrong.

He sensed the stone pearls had become hot.

The mountains suddenly rumbled with thunder. Was this the sound of several hundred stones being forcefully moved and rupturing the air?

Soon after, the sounds of cliffs collapsing could be heard.

The sound grew closer and closer, and the Heavenly Tome Monoliths that were the stone pearls became hotter and hotter, almost to a scalding degree.

Suddenly, all noises vanished.

An item was reflected, or to be more precise, burst into his eyes.

It was a seal. He didn't know what sort of stone it was carved from, but he couldn't see anything strange about it.

The stone seal gently swayed in the wind.

The seal was tied to a man's waist.

It was the middle-aged scholar.

Then, Chen Changsheng saw the several hundred Heavenstones that followed the middle-aged scholar.

Hiding the sky and covering earth, possessing an unearthly energy, it was obvious that they were limiting his speed, attempting to hold fast this unusual being, yet it was like they were the same as the seal, becoming one of his trinkets.

This was a cliff. Atop it was a shallow ditch dug out many years ago to serve as a makeshift path, the ditch filled with moss.

Chen Changsheng was below the cliff while the middle-aged scholar was on it, the two separated by only a few zhang.

"You humans seem to love trapping yourselves in webs of your own making."

The middle-aged scholar calmly gazed at him as he spoke, "I don't know if this Heavenstone array sealing the mountain is a plot, I only know that this will seal your death in this mountain."

Chen Changsheng did not reply because there was no meaning.

There was no despair in his heart, because this also had no meaning.

His spiritual sense fell on the black stone pearl, preparing to temporarily flee into the Garden of Zhou.

He didn't know if the middle-aged scholar could directly break through the spatial barrier around the Garden of Zhou—if his and Xu Yourong's conjecture was correct, this person had once infiltrated the Garden of Zhou. Thus, if he were to enter the Garden of Zhou right in front of this person, safety was by no means assured. But his back was to the cliff and he was already in dire straits, so he had to try.

What shocked him, what caught him by surprise, was that he was unable to use the black stone to enter the Garden of Zhou.

Nothing had changed—he was still in Mount Han with his back to the cliff.

He didn't know whether it was because the Heavenstone array had sealed off all space around Mount Han or if it was because the middle-aged scholar was so powerful that his mere approach was

sufficient to influence spatial artifacts.

In short, he was not able to enter the Garden of Zhou and had lost his final technique.

But he still did not despair.

He raised up the Stainless Sword, gripped the Vault Sheath, and stared at the middle-aged scholar, his expression very calm.

This was a foe whom he could not possibly defeat, but so what?

The middle-aged scholar seemed to show a little praise in his eyes. "You should know my purpose."

Chen Changsheng nodded.

The scholar continued, "With heartfelt appreciation, I will slowly dine on you."

Chen Changsheng replied, "I know the final move of the Mount Li Sword Style. I also know how to destroy both good and bad alike. Senior Su Li passed down to me a Blazing Sword—I can burn myself into a pile of ash."

The middle-aged scholar smiled, "Planning to use death to threaten me? Although the taste of live prey is better, I don't mind showing a little benevolence and killing you off first."

Chen Changsheng replied, "But you still haven't killed me."

Yes, if this middle-aged scholar were determined to kill him, then it didn't matter that he had the Yellow Paper Umbrella, the Thousand Li Button, or that letter; he would already be dead.

The scholar's smile faded and he emotionlessly declared, "In front of me, even thinking about dying is not so easy."

"I want to try."

In Xunyang City when facing Zhu Luo, Wang Po had said the same words, wanting to see if he could get one blow on Zhu Luo. Today in Mount Han, Chen Changsheng also spoke these words. He wanted to try and see if he could burn himself to ash before this scholar.

The ten thousand swords clattered in his sheath, preparing for the final charge. The letter was held tightly in his hand, ready at any time to release the final sword.

True essence flowed arduously through his severed meridians and storms stirred up over his sea of spiritual sense, all in preparation for the final ignition.

As he made this decision, he truly was very calm.

Of course, it was hard to not feel somewhat reluctant.

He still had many things that he had not finished.

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Time slowly passed, the ten thousand swords did not leave the sheath, and he was still alive. He had not burned.

It wasn't because the middle-aged scholar had taken control of his body, but because two people had appeared in front of the cliff.

It was two men, walking out of the ivy along the cliffs.

One man had a head of white and a nervous expression. Whenever he glanced at the middle-aged scholar, his face filled with fear. The other man had a face that seemed to have experienced the tribulations of time, yet it was difficult to tell his age. He wore very ordinary clothes and his manner was very calm. He was like a tourist exploring and searching for new sights.

But he was absolutely no ordinary man.

Because when he appeared, the middle-aged scholar no longer looked at Chen Changsheng, instead looking at him.

Back on the mountain path and stream bank, neither Liu Qing, nor Xiao De, nor even the Heavenstone array of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets could truly move the scholar's gaze from Chen Changsheng's body. This was because the aim of his first journey from Xuelao City after a thousand years was precisely Chen Changsheng.

To the middle-aged scholar, no one was more important than Chen Changsheng.

Yet when this man who looked like a tourist appeared, the scholar stared at him with abnormal focus.

The mountains and rivers on his face seemed to instantly become illusory and then vanished without a trace, revealing his true appearance.

Was this respect or wariness? Who on this world was worthy of his respect or required his wariness? Tianhai? The Pope? Or was it the White Emperor?

No, the appearance of this tourist was not that of those three Saints.

But to this middle-aged man, this tourist was far more worthy of his respect and vigilance than those three Saints.

The chilly wind howled past the cliff. The night sky, under the tearing of several thousand Heavenstones, was gradually breaking,

but it was still gloomy, even somewhat miserable.

For a very long time, nobody spoke, and the atmosphere of the cliff was extremely strange.

The middle-aged scholar and the tourist-like man gazed at each other in silence. A thunderstorm seemed to build up where their gazes met, but then it gradually faded away like flowing clouds.

Chen Changsheng knew that the situation had finally taken a turn for the better precisely because of this tourist, but just who was he?

Other than the Divine Empress, the Pope, and the White Emperor, just who in this world could demand so much of this scholar's attention, so much so that he was even let go for the moment? He simply could not think of a person.

After quite some time had passed, the middle-aged scholar finally spoke. His voice seemed incomparably sorrowful, even sentimental. "You were actually not dead."

The man smiled and replied, "His Majesty did not die, so how could I?"

The middle-aged scholar looked back at him, a little pity in his voice as he spoke, "But he still died in the end."



# Chapter 569 - Wanderer

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Who had lived and who had died? Upon hearing the middle-aged scholar's words, the tourist-like man fell silent, gazing at the distant mountains to calm his mind. As he gazed at the sea of clouds, he gave off the feeling of one weathered by the trials of time. He indifferently spoke, "Sir and His Majesty are not like him, so logically, you should not have appeared here."

The middle-aged scholar did not directly answer his question, instead saying, "Seeing that you've appeared, We finally have confirmed that this is not a plot."

The man asked, "For what reason?"

The middle-aged scholar explained, "If this were a plot planned by you, today, We really might have had some trouble, at least more trouble than now."

The man replied, "Not necessarily. Since he has always been at Your Majesty's side, how could he not see through one of my plans?"

The scholar shook his head. "He did not agree with Our decision to come, so this time, We came on Our own."

The man was somewhat surprised, asking, "Your Majesty has always followed his advice. Why not this time?"

The middle-aged scholar turned to gaze at the mountains across from the cliff. After a moment of silence, he replied, "Our time is running out."

The man agreed, "Your Majesty's time truly is running out."

When the middle-aged scholar spoke of time, he was clearly speaking of time on a much grander scale. When this man spoke of time, on the other hand, he was pointing out that the Heavenstone array of Mount Han had already been activated. If the scholar did not quickly depart, he really might end up surrounded by the supreme experts of the human world.

"You plan to delay Us for some time?" The middle-aged scholar did not turn his head. His voice was still apathetic, still confident and tyrannical.

The man indicated that his elderly companion should stand behind him. Then, gazing at the scholar's back, he said, "In these past few years, I've paid no attention to the affairs of the world, and both you and little Tianhai are too lazy to send people to kill me. I very much enjoy this life and have no intentions of changing it."

The middle-aged scholar turned to him and said, "You and he are both people that this emperor would wish to get rid of as quickly as possible. For you to survive to this day is because you are smart enough. Of course, you are strong enough as well. If either We or Tianhai wished to kill you, the two of us would inevitably find it rather troublesome."

The man replied, "Yes, in a little while, Tianhai and Yin will come over and you will be in trouble."

The scholar apathetically replied, "They will not come over. At most, only trash like Zhu Luo will come."

The man suddenly glanced at Chen Changsheng and asked, "Why does Your Majesty want to kill this youth?"

The middle-aged scholar continued to stare at the man as he spoke, "When We act, must We explain it to you? You are certainly not a Chen Emperor."

The man chuckled, saying, "Back then, I got used to asking His Majesty for justification. Today, I got used to asking Your Majesty for reasons, please do not take offense."

In these words and in this entire conversation, the word 'Majesty' had been mentioned many times, but they weren't speaking of the same Majesty.

The middle-aged scholar jeered, "No wonder your Chen Emperor never liked you."

The man replied, "All these are stale and trivial matters of the past—what need is there to keep bringing them up? Your Majesty, your time is truly running out."

The middle-aged scholar calmly looked at him and asked, "You wish to preserve this youth's life?"

The man affirmed, "Correct."

With an apathetic expression, the scholar asked, "In exchange for what?"

"Of course...it's Your Majesty's time. Your time is your life," the man pointed out.

The scholar replied, "A thousand years ago, you went to all the trouble of leading cavalry over ten thousand li of snowy plains for the sole purpose of killing Us...today's opportunity is much better than the one from back then. We do not understand why you're willing to give it up, just for this unremarkable little fellow?"

"If he really is some unremarkable little fellow, what need is there for Your Majesty to make a special trip to kill him? Although I don't know the reason, I can at least be sure that he's very important to humanity."

The man continued, "Your Majesty's life is naturally even more important than his, but the problem is, I'm not that Sir on the mountain peak that calculates fate, I don't believe that using this life to exchange for Your Majesty's life is a correct choice. In reality, it's always been impossible to place a value on this thing called life."

The scholar replied, "Although these words are absurd, they're also reasonable."

How could the absurd be reasonable? The average person wouldn't be able to understand, like Chen Changsheng or that elder timidly hiding behind the man, but the two people in this conversation understood.

They were both outstanding figures that had lived for ages, so their way of doing things was naturally out of the norm. Unexpectedly, the scholar turned without the slightest hesitation and departed without any care whatsoever. His departing Xuelao City to Mount Han had been such an important, such a risky, action, and to have to return without any sort of benefit, how difficult to accept such a thing would be.

Because no matter how hard it was to accept, one still had to accept what had already happened.

The middle-aged scholar knew that the man had spoken correctly. Everything this man had said and done his entire life seemed to have been done correctly.

So he chose to leave.

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Watching the scholar's figure disappear into the dark mists and hearing the rumbling crashes of thunder fading into the distance, only after a very long time did the tourist-like man confirm that the scholar was far away and would not return. He softly sighed, seeming very sorrowful.

"Can he break through the Heavenstone array of Mount Han?"

The old man that had been hiding behind him all this time finally dared to stand up. Still somewhat overcome by fear, he asked, "If he can't break it, might he come back?"

The man smiled, saying, "Heavenly Secrets has always regarded himself highly, it's inevitable that he's somewhat overestimated himself."

The old man understood his meaning: he was saying that as long as the scholar was not disturbed, he would need only a short time to break through the array and leave. He couldn't help but be somewhat confused, asking, "This being the case, if Sir were to act just then, that really was the best opportunity to kill him."

"A thousand years ago, no matter if you were a human or demi-human expert, what you wanted to do the most was to kill him, but...the situation now is different."

"What's different?"

"He lost a round to Big Brother and ceased to be invincible, and

he's also already old."

"But...I still think it's such a pity."

"In addition, if we were to fight, what would happen to this little fellow?" The man pointed to Chen Changsheng as he spoke.

The old man also turned to Chen Changsheng and said with coldness and scorn, "It's all because of this little fellow that Sir's hands and feet were tied."

Before the middle-aged scholar, the old man had been particularly humble. To the man beside him, he was very reverential. Yet the words and expression he aimed at Chen Changsheng were all very rude.

After the Grand Examination, when it was faintly established that he was the successor to the Pope, no one in the world dared to treat Chen Changsheng with such rudeness. Even his opponents would also maintain the appropriate courtesy. It could only be said that in the past, this old man had seen far too many powerful figures, so he would not hold anything back for the sake of Chen Changsheng's identity.

Chen Changsheng did not respond because he was currently too stunned, utterly incapable of working up any sort of response. In reality, when this tourist began speaking with the scholar, Chen Changsheng found himself utterly speechless. To be able to make the middle-aged scholar retreat with a few words, just where in the present world could such a powerful figure be found?

He knew who the middle-aged scholar was, and after hearing the conversation, he could already guess at the true identity of this tourist-like man.

He was too astonished, not daring to believe his conclusion.

The man had previously said to the scholar that they shouldn't mention those old and trivial matters of the past anymore...no, those matters were grand events recorded in the annals of history! They were all by necessity grand figures recorded in the history book, and the records concerning them assuredly took up the most space and the most important position!

"Little friend, why did he want to kill you?"

At this moment, a gentle voice resounded amongst the cliffs, awakening Chen Changsheng from his shocked stupor.

He stared at the man that had walked up to him, his mouth agape, unable to speak for a long time.

The man was elegant and handsome, his two brows somewhat speckled with wind and frost. As he spoke, his lips seemed to exude an elusive scent of books and scrolls, giving off an indescribable sense of wisdom.

As Chen Changsheng stared at this face, he found it simply impossible to think of a response. He could only stare in



astonishment, and even the hand gripping his dagger slightly trembled.

Anyone who suddenly saw a legend, thought dead by all, appear in front of them would probably feel the same. This wasn't even mentioning the fact that this legendary figure had always been his most admired and respected model.

His voice trembling, he said, "Sir is..."

The man smiled and shook his head, indicating that he didn't need to ask.

"It cannot be said, or else we will invite the wrath of the heavens," the old man on the side warned. His expression was very serious and he didn't seem to be making a joke.

Chen Changsheng did not understand, but he very obediently shut his mouth tight, afraid that if he really did randomly speak, he would divulge some heavenly secret and thus bring the man some sort of trouble. Then, he rolled up the front of his gown and prostrated himself before the man, preparing to kowtow.

The man did not allow him to kneel down. He grabbed both his arms, smiling in silence.

His gaze seemed to pick out something on Chen Changsheng's body and his brows slowly rose up as if he had seen something very interesting.

Ultimately, he shook his head, lightly sighed, turned, and began walking away from the cliff.

The old man followed behind.

Chen Changsheng hurried over, but to his surprise, the man and the elder had walked straight into the abyss beyond the cliff.

At this time, the darkness that had enveloped Mount Han was gradually fading, almost like Mount Han was welcoming a second dawn.

A white cloud had come from some place to rise up from the stream below.

The man and the elder had walked away from the cliff and fallen upon this cloud.

The white cloud leisurely drifted off into the distance.

This was what was meant [to wander amongst the clouds](#).

(TN: 云游 usually translates to wander/roam, but it literally translates to 'traveling the clouds'.)

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The mountain wind was slightly chilly as the day emerged once more. Presumably, the middle-aged scholar had already broken through the Heavenstone array and returned north.

Chen Changsheng did not feel like rejoicing over his new lease on life, nor even think about such a thing. He only stood on the cliff, blankly staring in the direction that the white cloud had disappeared.

Previously, after waking from his stupor, he had so many things he wanted to say to the tourist-like man, but it was a pity that there was no time. He had wanted to say, "I went to Lingyan Pavilion, I saw Sir's portrait there and also read Sir's notebook and took away the black stone Sir left behind..."

Thinking this, he caressed the string of stone pearls and gazed at the black stone, not speaking for a long time. Afterwards, he clasped his hands and made a deep bow in the direction the white cloud had vanished. He then turned and began walking towards the cliff, in the opposite direction of the sea of clouds, yet before he could walk two steps, he collapsed on the ground.

# Chapter 570 - The Meeting Of Two Sovereigns

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The white cloud dispersed over a verdant valley.

The valley was extremely peaceful and serene, with fantastically shaped trees and vines growing in abundance. The forests by the cliffs would occasionally resound with the low howls of some powerful monster. But those monsters did not dare approach this place, because this place contained a lofty, majestic, and ancient Buddhist temple, and also because this ancient temple served as residence to two people.

The old man asked in confusion, "We've secluded ourselves for several centuries and were able to go out after such difficulty, and we return just like that?"

The other man smiled and said, "It wasn't completely without gain. At least we got a glance at that youth."

The elder replied, "Could it be that Sir especially went out to see that youth?"

The man replied, "That youth is Shang's disciple and also cared for by Yin. Little Tianhai even requested for Heavenly Secrets to come over especially to examine him. It's hard for me to not be curious."

The old man replied, "Sir is certainly not the type of person who

will step back into the secular world out of curiosity."

The man said, "That youth obtained my notebook and Heavenly Tome Monolith, and brought down a night of starlight in the Mausoleum of Books. Many people say that he's very similar to me from the past, which is naturally different from my view."

The old man asked, "Then what did Sir see?"

The man's expression grew solemn. "That youth...will soon die."

The old man was flabbergasted by this statement. "Then what should be done?"

The man walked into the main hall of the ancient temple and gazed at the dilapidated Great Buddha. "Everyone wishes to defy the heavens and change fate, but how could they know that all causes and effects lie within the causes and effects themselves. The more one wants to change fate, the more impossible it is to pull away from the river of fate. I cannot see how his fate will ultimately turn out. In the end, one must still look at him."

"Then what about Qiushan Jun and Xu Yourong? When does Sir plan to go see them?"

"We'll talk about that later." The man glanced out of the temple at the sky and warned, "It's going to rain. Quickly finish off today's painting."

This ancient temple's exterior was extremely run-down, seemingly abandoned for countless years, and the same could be said for the Buddhist images in the various halls of the temple. But the succession of the Buddhist school on the continent had long since been severed, and it was utterly unheard of amongst the common people. Thus, this sort of scene was actually quite commonplace. In reality, that this ancient Buddhist temple could continue to exist until now was the truly puzzling matter here.

However, the paintings on the stone walls of the temple were extremely complete and even seemed very new. It was obvious that they had only been painted in these past few years.

The paintings on the wall were all extremely beautiful. It could even be said that it would be simply impossible to find such an outstanding painter in the world today.

If Chen Changsheng were to see these wall paintings, he would assuredly think of those portraits in the Lingyan Pavilion.

The old man stood on a wooden frame, holding a painting brush and preparing to get to work. In the end, however, he still could not hold himself back. "Back there, you really should have tried."

The other man sat on a broken bench in the front of the hall, his hand carrying a pot of spring water that he was slowly drinking from. Upon hearing this, he smiled and said, "I can't even beat him."

The old man put down his paintbrush and gazed out of the hall,

saying, "Last year, Su Li was outside Xuelao City..."

The other man did not reply, only quietly looked into the distance.

The old man sighed internally and no longer continued to ask.

At the time, the Demon Lord had been within Xuelao City, Black Robe without. How would he have told him to attack? How could he have possibly attacked?

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On the shore of the Red River, on the walls of White Emperor City, the cloud slowly descended and then vanished without a trace, but it was not known whether this was lucky or inauspicious.

On the Dew Platform, the Tianhai Divine Empress no longer looked northward. Turning, she descended down the platform.

In the depths of the Li Palace, the Pope gazed at the Green Leaf in contemplation. In terms of both posture and expression, nothing had changed.

The darkness enveloping Mount Han slowly tore apart and

drifted far away, the heavens and earth returned to day once more. By the lake at the summit, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets lightly wiped away the blood at his lips. As he gazed into the depths of the snowy plains far north beyond the mountains, his ancient eyes seemed a tinge muddy, somewhat unable to see clearly the way ahead.

On the southern foothills of Mount Han, a scribe appeared, with a red flower tied to his little finger. Stained by the dust of several thousand li, it was no longer as gaudy. A man wearing a bamboo hat appeared in the small village beyond Mount Han's gateway, his cheeks corroded by the sea breeze and extremely solemn. They had come late—the middle-aged scholar had already left Mount Han—but they did not just leave. Instead, along with those two Prefects of the Orthodoxy wielding the precious treasures of the Orthodoxy, they vigilantly stood watch around Mount Han, guarding against possible changes.

On the long battlefield in the north of the continent, the Great Zhou Northern Army and the cultivating experts dispatched from the southern sects and families to assist the northerners received secret orders from their respective commanders to move out, and began to nervously prepare for battle. The demi-human army began to move along the Red River, proceeding towards the snowy plains in the northwest. On the way, they slaughtered a small tribe of demons.

Whether it was the Divine Generals of the Great Zhou Imperial Court that had sent out the order to mobilize or the masters of the various sects and families of the south, none of them knew the cause of all this. The sounds of discussion could be heard everywhere in those military headquarters and caves. The mood



was abnormally tense, causing extreme unease.

As for those people in the small village outside Mount Han and the denizens of the capital, they were completely unaware of all these events. As normal, they ate, labored, and lived, not even able to imagine that in these seemingly normal summer days, the war between the demons and the alliance of humans and demi-humans was about to break out once more after one thousand years.

All of this was just because...the Demon Lord had left Xuelao City.

He had gone to Mount Han, and then left Mount Han.

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The people who knew that the Demon Lord had stepped back into the Central Plains were extremely few in number.

Even fewer people knew that after the Demon Lord left Mount Han, on his way back to Xuelao City, he encountered a person on the snowy plains.

Only after many years did the common people come to know of this meeting, but this was actually the most important meeting in all of this grand event.

No appointment had been made, but this was no chance encounter.

This person had waited in the snowy plains for the Demon Lord for a very long time.

Wind and snow filled the sky and this person was white all over. From his hair to his clothes, from his brows to his lips, all of it was white.

He was not stained white from the snow. This white was even whiter than snow, so white that it was uncomfortable, white to the extreme.

A person that was able to calculate the Demon Lord's return route and wait for him midway, that dared to wait in this place for him—even looking over the past thousand years, there were not many people capable of this feat.

To be more precise, this was not a human, but a great demi-human with world-shaking cultivation.

The White Emperor of the west.

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A thousand years ago, the demons went south and the continent raged in chaos. Experts emerged in great numbers and left behind countless battles that would go down in history. Amongst them, the most famous were naturally the battle in Luoyang between Zhou Dufu and Emperor Taizong as well as the mortal battle between him and the Demon Lord. But there was one more secret battle which, in terms of fighting strength and the bitterness of battle, was absolutely not any less than these other two battles. This was the battle of supreme experts under the starry sky in the Garden of Zhou between Chen Xuanba and Zhou Dufu.

With Chen Xuanba's death in battle, Zhou Dufu's disappearance, and Emperor Taizong's return to the sea of stars, of the four supreme experts of the past, only the Demon Lord remained. In the following one thousand years, no such heaven-shaking battles occurred, nor even a battle that approached that level.

Until today, this meeting in these plains in which wind and snow intermingled.

Since they had met, they would naturally fight.

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# Chapter 571 - A Lake Many Years In The Future

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Whether discussing power or status, this battle between the Demon Lord and the White Emperor was well-qualified to be placed on par with the three battles from one thousand years ago.

Rather regretfully, this battle did not have any spectators.

Back then, Zhou Dufu's battle with Chen Xuanba also had no spectators, but afterwards, Zhou Dufu had narrated the details of the battle many times. In an extraordinarily rare sight, Zhou Dufu did not attempt to conceal his admiration for Chen Xuanba and even clearly stated that he wanted to proclaim to the world just how amazing Chen Xuanba was.

As for this battle, afterwards, neither the Demon Lord nor the White Emperor spoke of it, so no one knew of the particulars.

No one even knew the result of this battle.

The entire world only knew that after that day, a massive crater appeared in the snowy plains to the north of Mount Han. The crater in the snowy plain was around thirty zhang deep and ten-odd li in circumference. If one stood in the crater and looked around, one would still feel like they were on a plain.

This was the trace left behind by this battle that was the most difficult to obliterate, and also the most direct descriptor of the

intensity this battle had reached.

The extent of this battle's influence was even greater. Seventy li away in the north plains was a forest of evergreen trees. Afterwards, hunters of the demon race that were familiar with the area were never able to find the slightest trace of this forest again. Moreover, a camp of the demon army's wolf cavalry concealed in this forest also strangely disappeared.

The world seventy li away had been destroyed, so the snowy plains at the center of the battle did not even need to be discussed.

No living beings could be found at the bottom of the vast crater, only the once incomparably firm stones now crushed into a fine powder. No corpses could be found either—those snow foxes, monsters, and even smaller animals had already vanished without a trace. Only by digging deep into the gravel could perhaps a few bloodstains be found.

The most frightening of all was the unimaginably scalding smoke left over from the battle, which rose from the crater like some star had once fallen there.

Such a scalding crater naturally could not accumulate any snow. When the snowflakes fell, the snow would melt into water, gradually forming thin brooklets, then streams, and finally lakes. With the incessant wind and snow, the surface of the water continuously rose even after many years. Thus, in the snowy plains to the north of Mount Han, a blue lake appeared that would never freeze for years upon years.

Just like the Heaven Lake at the peak of Mount Han.

Of course, this was a matter many years in the future. As for the present, almost nobody knew that a crater had suddenly appeared to the north of Mount Han and that it would become a lake in the following years. Even fewer people knew that this was because a battle had taken place there. Naturally, nobody knew about this battle's final result.

This battle only had three spectators.

After the conclusion of this battle, two of these spectators walked out of the wind and snow.

Walking in the front was a middle-aged Daoist, his appearance very ordinary. Walking behind was a youth, his appearance very unusual. He was lame, a crutch under his armpit. His black hair hanging over his eyes blocked off half his face. It was precisely those two that had vanished from Xining Village and were henceforth never found, Daoist Ji and...Yu Ren.

The White Emperor gazed at Daoist Ji and slowly nodded his head.

Daoist Ji slightly bent his body forward in return.

The White Emperor glanced at Yu Ren, then turned and vanished into the snowstorm.

Daoist Ji quietly gazed north, then he took Yu Ren and disappeared into the snowstorm in the opposite direction.

From beginning to end, nobody spoke.

Several hundred li to the north, in the snowy plains, Black Robe put away his somewhat broken-down metal plate and gazed south.

The howling wind lifted the lower corner of his hood, revealing the lower half of his face.

His face did not have the slightest emotion. Paired with the faint greenish hue on his skin, it seemed particularly strange and frightening. Yet by just looking at a small part of his face, even if it was just the mouth and lower jaw, one would still feel that this person was very beautiful. To make a strange face engender feelings of beauty, just how beautiful was the face itself?

Not long after Daoist Ji and Yu Ren disappeared into the snow, he pulled down his hood and began walking north into the snowstorm.

He had not gotten close to the snowy plains around Xuelao City when he was blocked by an enormous shadow.

It was a gigantic Mountain-toppling Fiend.

This Mountain-toppling Fiend of ruthless nature and monstrous strength was at this time extremely docile, because it was a mount.

A cold and ruthless voice came from the horn of the Mountain-toppling Fiend.

"This commander seems to have arrived a little late."

The Demon Commander sat on the horn, leaning against the lower jaw of the beast while coldly staring at Black Robe below.

His armor was covered in golden lines and green rust, looking extremely dazzling.

His voice was abnormally raw and hoarse, harsh as metal grinding on metal.

Black Robe paid no attention to this second most powerful expert of the demons. His head lowered in silence, he prepared to walk by.

The Demon Commander's voice grew more furious as he sharply yelled, "As the Military Advisor, you failed to dissuade His Majesty. What punishment do you think you deserve!"

Black Robe's voice was indifferent and uninterested. "His Majesty safely returned, so what need is there for you and I to stir trouble over nothing?"



The Demon Commander was even more infuriated, yelling out in rebuke, "His Majesty is heavily wounded and you actually dare say that I am getting upset over nothing?"

Hearing this, Black Robe finally stopped. Raising his head upwards at the massive Mountain-toppling Fiend, he said frigidly, "You actually dare attempt to probe out the condition of His Majesty's injuries from me? If His Majesty were to find out, you would die a nasty death."

The Demon Commander coldly snorted, then said, "You believe that His Majesty will still trust in you as he did in the past?"

Black Robe calmly replied, "His Majesty has already trusted me for several hundred years, and he will continue to trust me for many more."

The Demon Commander sharply said, "If His Majesty really did suffer severe injuries, just who do you think can save your life? Don't forget, in these past years, how many ministers have you executed, how many grand elders have you offended? Moreover, even if you've achieved much for my Divine race, in the end, you are still a human!"

Black Robe ignored him and continued into the snowstorm.

No one knew of this conversation in the snow, and even if they did, they would find it very ordinary.

To the officers and soldiers of the Demon race, the Demon Commander and Military Advisor not agreeing was a very commonplace affair.

Yet if one carefully thought it over, they would be able to realize that this conversation contained many meanings that were not commonplace at all.

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After a thousand years, the Demon Lord once more appeared in the human world. The continent was thrown into upheaval and became extremely tense. Mount Han, as the source of all this, was even more so.

The Heavenstone array had been forcefully broken by the Demon Lord, so the several thousand Heavenstones returned to their places. Those gaps in the fields, cliffs, and lake waters were once more filled. The injured were brought to the mountain summit for treatment, the dead were sent back to their hometowns. Those collapsed mountain paths and cliff walls also began to be repaired, but the mood could not be brought back to its former tranquility. The stewards of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and the cultivators attending the Boiling Stone Summit all had very nervous expressions.

Even now, not many people knew just what happened yesterday,

why the supreme experts of the human world had hurried over in succession to Mount Han. The truth still remained obscured by dense fog, but people could sense that something major had certainly occurred. This was because of the heavy guard around Mount Han and also because of the oppressive atmosphere coming from the house by the lake.

Linghai Zhiwang and Mao Qiuyu, who had at first been denied entry to Mount Han, had appeared at the summit and were standing outside this house with ugly complexions.

There were ten-odd houses along the lake shore, intended for the cultivators attending the Boiling Stone Summit to stay in. This house had the best position, facing the lake and against the mountain. It was exceptionally quiet and the scenery from the house was also the best. However, it was very obvious that this was not enough for Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang's moods to improve in the slightest.

Because at this moment, Chen Changsheng was still unconscious in this house.

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## Chapter 572 - How Did You Escape?

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After opening his eyes with some difficulty and seeing Tang Thirty-Six's concerned face, Chen Changsheng felt that there was nothing out of the ordinary. However, after seeing that Zhexiu's perpetually indifferent face was actually showing some concern, he couldn't but be a little shocked and then get the impulse to laugh.

His injuries had not been light—his sea of consciousness had been shaken, resulting in his unconscious spell.

It wasn't because of the internal injuries he had received when he had used the Thousand Li Button and collided against the Heavenstone array enveloping Mount Han, but all because of the Demon Lord's distant finger.

At the time, the Demon Lord, standing by the stream and separated from him by a vast distance, had pointed his finger.

He had used the Yellow Paper Umbrella to block this Qi, but he had not been able to block the monstrous might contained within.

"You actually woke up so quickly?"

Tang Thirty-Six was very surprised to see him awake so soon and leaned forward to help him up.

Zhexiu commented, "He really did wake up quickly."

Sitting against the head of the bed, Chen Changsheng looked at them and said, "Why can't I see any excitement on your faces?"

Zhexiu ignored this question while Tang Thirty-Six replied, "The Elder of Heavenly Secrets personally came to see you and confirmed that there was nothing wrong, so there was nothing for us to be worried about."

Chen Changsheng thought of those two worried faces he saw the moment he woke up and knew that they just didn't want to admit it. He would not needle at them, instead saying, "The Elder of Heavenly Secrets confirms that there's nothing wrong with me, so that means that there really is nothing wrong with me? You should invite Principal Mao to come and see."

At present, Mao Qiuyu was Archbishop of the Hall of Illustrious Persons, but they were used to addressing him as principal.

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "The Elder of Heavenly Secrets calculates the stars above and rivers below and he has never once been wrong. If he's says there's nothing, there's naturally nothing wrong."

Chen Changsheng fell silent, then said, "Then did he calculate that we would encounter these things?"

With these words, the room became abnormally silent. Only the faint sound of voices in the distance could be heard.

This peace and silence were because they all felt that all the things that happened after entering Mount Han reeked with the stench of plotting and conspiracy, but the primary reason was that they had all recalled the middle-aged scholar.

The picture of the middle-aged scholar holding his hands behind him as he gazed at the persimmons had left far too deep of an impression on them.

They knew that it would be very difficult to forget that scene for the rest of their lives.

After quite some time had passed, Tang Thirty-Six whispered to Chen Changsheng, "You're sure...it was that person?"

Without speaking, Chen Changsheng slowly nodded his head.

Tang Thirty-Six lowered his head and rubbed his forehead, powerless to speak.

He was the sole son of the Wenshui Tangs, not even fearing the Tianhai clan much. It really could be said that he feared nothing in the heavens and earth, the many stories that had taken place in front of the Orthodox Academy proof of this. Yet when he thought of the middle-aged scholar's identity, even he felt fear in his heart.

"When I was very small, I had a dream."

A voice broke the downcast mood in the room.

Chen Changsheng and Tang Thirty-Six looked over.

Zhexiu looked at the other two and expressionlessly continued, "It was to kill him."

Chen Changsheng was shocked speechless. To aspire to kill the Demon Lord from such a young age, this was truly too...

"Formidable," Tang Thirty-Six said to Zhexiu with heartfelt admiration. "You're far too formidable."

"But...that's just a dream."

Zhexiu thought of the scene he saw at the mountain path, his complexion somewhat pale. "I never imagined that I would see him with my own eyes."

Tang Thirty-Six became rather incensed at these words. Waving his hands to indicate his disdain, he turned to Chen Changsheng and asked, "How did you manage to survive?"

This was a matter all of Mount Han, even all of the world, wished to know, and also the point in this entire event that was most crucial and most difficult to understand. Even when delayed by the Heavenstone array of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, the Demon Lord still wanted to kill Chen Changsheng, so just how had he managed to survive?

Relying on strength, talent, magical artifacts, or will?

No, this was the Demon Lord.

No matter how outstanding Chen Changsheng was in these aspects, it was impossible for him to escape by relying on them.

Upon hearing Tang Thirty-Six's question, Zhexiu did not show much expression, only moved two steps closer to the bed. It was very obvious that he was also very interested in this answer.

Chen Changsheng did not immediately answer the question, instead using his eyes to give a sign to Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six understood. He walked to the door and looked around, then took out a magical artifact from his bosom. A faint Qi sprung forth that cut off any prying eyes.

"I...met a person." Chen Changsheng hesitated, then continued, "That person might have been Lord Wang."

Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu looked in each other in the eyes, shock evident on their faces.

Especially for Zhexiu, this resolute and persistent wolf youth, besides the Demon Lord's name, what other name could cause him to lose control over his emotions?



Lord Wang...this world had many people surnamed Wang, and also many people that served as officials, and there were also many people that were called Lord Wang. In the past one thousand years, only one did not require any sort of prefix or explanation. Just by calling him Lord Wang, everyone in the world would know who it meant.

That person was called Wang Zhice.

The room became incomparably quiet, a silence that lasted even longer than the last.

After this interminable time had passed, Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu finally awoke from their shock.

Tang Thirty-Six sighed, "Lord Wang...really did not die."

Chen Changsheng was somewhat surprised, so he asked Tang Thirty-Six, "You guys aren't shocked?"

Tang Thirty-Six angrily replied, "We were just like quails a moment ago, how else do you want us to be shocked?"

"But...you said 'really' just now...could it be that many people already guessed that Lord Wang wasn't dead?"

"Of course, these sorts of rumors have been circulating all the time, saying that Lord Wang was still alive, just hiding away as a recluse from the world."

"But in the Daoist Canon and the histories, it's written very clearly that Lord Wang's soul has already returned to the sea of stars."

"If you can believe all the words in the histories, then women can become emperors."

"The Tianhai Empress..."

"It's a metaphor...in brief, this matter has always been one of the two great riddles and people have always been speculating about it."

"Two great riddles?" Chen Changsheng asked in confusion.

Tang Thirty-Six explained, "The final ends of Zhou Dufu and Lord Wang."

Chen Changsheng thought of that obsidian coffin in the Mausoleum of Zhou that was as barren as a plain and seemed to understand. "Because no one has discovered their skeletons?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "To be more precise, no one even knows if they've died or not...back then, no matter if it was Emperor Taizong or those legends of the Lingyan Pavilion, they all ultimately returned to the sea of stars, all of them witnessed by many people. Only those two are exceptions."

Chen Changsheng thought it over and then said with extreme confidence, "Then, at least one of those riddles has been solved."

Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu once more looked at each other and asked uncertainly, "You're sure?"

It must be known that this was no ordinary matter. Once news that Wang Zhice was still alive got out, it would assuredly shake the entire continent.

Chen Changsheng nodded but then suddenly remembered something and his expression subtly changed.

# Chapter 573 - The True Crux Of The Matter

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"What's wrong?" Tang Thirty-Six asked.

Before, when he was in front of the cliff, Chen Changsheng had wanted to verify whether or not this tourist-like man was actually the legendary Wang Zhice. The man had only silently smiled and shaken his head, but the old man that followed him had very seriously warned him that this was a heavenly secret that could not be broached without risking the wrath of the heavens...

"This matter...it seems that I shouldn't have spoken about it."

Chen Changsheng turned to Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu, asking them anxiously, "You guys can't talk about this to anyone else."

Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu looked in each other's eyes for the third time today.

The room once more descended into silence.

After some time had passed, Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu nodded.

Upon seeing this, Chen Changsheng relaxed. He was keenly aware that if these two friends of his promised something, they would definitely carry it out.

"Your fate...is really good."

As Tang Thirty-Six spoke, his tone seemed to be very regretful, even tinged with a hint of almost indiscernible envy. Money was all-powerful and there were very few things in this world that he could not do, so he very rarely envied others. However, Chen Changsheng's luck and good fortune were sufficient to make him envious.

The legendary Wang Zhice was actually still alive and had reappeared in the world with only Chen Changsheng to witness it. Moreover, it just so happened to be when the Demon Lord was attempting to kill him. At that moment, other than a person like Wang Zhice whose appearance was utterly impossible, who could have saved him?

Ever since he had arrived in the capital from Xining, Chen Changsheng had heard far too many times that his fate was good. Of course, he knew that his fate wasn't good, but after hearing this evaluation so many times, he couldn't help but occasionally think that perhaps all these lucky encounters of his were the starry sky's way of compensating him for his fate.

Tang Tang Thirty-Six, rather puzzled, asked, "Since Lord Wang is still alive, why has he never appeared in all these years?"

Zhexiu expressionlessly replied, "Why does he need to appear?"

Tang Thirty-Six retorted, "Whether it's opposing the demons or strengthening my Great Zhou..."

He trailed off as he understood the meaning of Zhexiu's words. Nobody knew what happened before Wang Zhice's disappearance, but the entire continent knew that Emperor Taizong had truthfully never much liked him. In addition, if he really did reappear, how would the Great Zhou Imperial Court treat him?

As for opposing the demons...Wang Zhice had already done too much, and no one in the entire human world was qualified to demand that he do any more.

"How many days was I unconscious?" Only at this point did Chen Changsheng remember to ask this question.

Tang Thirty-Six was still lost in the shock from the fact that Wang Zhice was still alive and did not respond to his question.

Zhexiu revealed five fingers, showing his entire palm.

It turned out that he had been unconscious for five days. In these five days, who knew what had occurred on Mount Han? Chen Changsheng asked, "Is there anything new?"

Zhexiu thought this question over and discovered that he would need to say far too many things. As a result, he shook his head and slapped his palm on Tang Thirty-Six's back, rousing him from his daze.

Tang Thirty-Six talked about the tense situation around the continent and also about the nervous mood of Mount Han.

"Then...will the Boiling Stone Summit still be convened?"

"Based on Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang's position, if you were to remain in a coma, they would take you back to the capital and the summit would naturally conclude, but now, you're awake."

"Everyone attending the Boiling Stone Summit has arrived? They didn't encounter any dangers?"

Tang Thirty-Six gave him a very profound glance, then said, "Everyone that should have come has arrived, no problems."

Upon hearing the news that Chen Changsheng was awake, Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang entered the house to inquire. Upon confirming that his condition was fine, they withdrew the proposal of returning to the capital. Important figures of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets also came to visit, their attitudes very respectful, even humble. They even said that in a few days, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets would come personally to do this and that...

Chen Changsheng was rather confused. Even if he was the successor of the Pope, there was no need for the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets to fuss over him so. This wasn't even mentioning the fact that the Elder of Heavenly Secrets was the leader of the Storms of the Eight Directions, such a high position. And wasn't it possible that when the Demon Lord broke through the array a few days ago, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets suffered considerable injuries?

As he thought of these problems and thought even more about those other problems, time passed. It was now late in the night. Everyone within and without the small house was asleep while the Orthodoxy and experts of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets vigilantly patrolled nearby. Everything was quiet and one could hear the sound of the lake water slapping against the rocks.

Upon waking, Chen Changsheng had asked Tang Thirty-Six whether all the people attending the Boiling Stone Summit had arrived and whether or not they had encountered any dangers. When Tang Thirty-Six had replied that everyone that should have come had arrived, his words seemed to contain a deeper meaning. This was because he clearly understood just who Chen Changsheng really wanted to ask about.

When everyone on the peak was asleep, the person that should have come finally arrived.

The window was pushed open. The warm breeze off the lake drifted, bringing with it a lithe and graceful figure.

This figure drifted along with the breeze until it drifted all the way to his bed, sat down, and softly asked, "How are you?"

Chen Changsheng looked at her eyes like two pools of limpid autumn water, saw the deeply concerned expression in her eyes, and suddenly realized that being injured was not a difficult thing to endure.



"I'm okay, really."

The visitor was naturally Xu Yourong.

Even hearing Chen Changsheng say he was okay did not allow her to relax. She closed her eyes, raised her right hand, and placed it in the air precisely over the point between Chen Changsheng's eyebrows.

A sacred and pure light descended and flowed into Chen Changsheng's body.

The number of people that could use the Sacred Light technique at this level was extremely small. Other than the Pope and the three cardinals of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green, she was probably the strongest.

Chen Changsheng only felt like he was caressed by the spring wind that then entered his body. His true essence flowed happily through his meridians like the water in a stream on a spring day and his injuries gradually recovered.

"Thank you."

"Just who was that person?"

The previous Holy Maiden had gone off together with Su Li, and with South Stream Temple under the leadership of the young Xu Yourong, some news really could not be known too accurately.

"It should be the Demon Lord," Chen Changsheng replied.

The room was very quiet. After a long time, Xu Yourong reached out her hand and patted the back of Chen Changsheng's hand, saying, "As long as you're fine, it's okay."

It was very obvious that she had never consoled someone before, so whether it was her patting hand or the tone of her voice, it was all rather awkward and clumsy.

She did not ask Chen Changsheng how he had survived, but Chen Changsheng was not prepared to hide it from her, even though he had said during the day to Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu that this matter should not be mentioned to others.

"I might have met Lord Wang Zhice."

After hearing this, Xu Yourong was truly shocked. From the countless gory and frightening scenes the middle-aged scholar had created by the stream, the incomparably powerful strength he had displayed, and the response of the human world's experts towards him, she had long ago basically concluded that the scholar was the Demon Lord, she just needed to hear it from Chen Changsheng's mouth to finally confirm it. However, she had not imagined that she would actually hear the heaven-shaking news that Wang Zhice was still alive from Chen Changsheng.

To her, this news was even more shocking than the reappearance of the Demon Lord.

Wang Zhice had a very special place in the history of the human world. Back when the humans and demi-humans joined hands to oppose the demon cavalry, Emperor Taizong had been commander-in-chief, the leader, while Wang Zhice had been the vice-commander. He had personally led the allied armies across the tens of thousands of li of snowy plains, pressing up all the way to Xuelao City. Purely on merit alone, he was not one bit below Emperor Taizong, and could even be his better. If not for the coup of the Hundred Herb Garden and other complex reasons, if not for the fact that Emperor Taizong harbored a deep dislike and fear towards him, he would have absolutely been worthy of occupying the first position in the Lingyan Pavilion.

Although this news was very shocking, Xu Yourong awoke very quickly from her stupor. She asked, "Why did the Demon Lord come to kill you?"

To Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu, how Chen Changsheng had survived his encounter with the Demon Lord was the most important matter and they also believed that was the question that everyone was the most worried about. However, Xu Yourong was much more cool-headed, much soberer, so she directly asked about the true crux of the matter.

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## Chapter 574 - This Way Is No Good

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After losing to Zhou Dufu, the Demon Lord was severely injured and tended to his wounds in Xuelao City for one thousand years. What had he wanted to do with his sudden appearance in Mount Han? What task would cause such an important figure like the Demon Lord to take such an enormous risk? What was on Chen Changsheng's body? Or what did his existence signify?

This was something that the Elder of Heavenly Secrets could not calculate no matter how he tried. Xu Yourong's Fated Star Plate also could not calculate this, but she could just ask.

She dared to ask and Chen Changsheng dared to give the answer, even though this was his greatest secret. To her, he had no secrets, let alone the fact that he had already confessed this secret to her in the Mausoleum of Zhou. To be more precise, a part of this secret of his was already in her body.

Chen Changsheng pointed at his own body. He didn't speak, only mouthing a single word: "Blood."

Xu Yourong understood. Coupled with the records preserved in South Stream Temple on the injuries inflicted on the Demon Lord back then, she completely understood the origin of all this.

"Nanke?" she similarly mouthed.

Chen Changsheng nodded.

Xu Yourong looked at him, her eyes filled with concern.

The Demon Lord knew Chen Changsheng's secret, which also meant that he could attack Chen Changsheng at any time. He was the continent's most frightening expert, and to be coldly watched by this sort of expert at every moment, how dark was such a shadow? To live under this sort of shadow, what sort of pressure would one have to bear?

Xu Yourong asked herself, but even though her Dao heart was brightly lit, she found it impossible to imagine how she would respond to this sort of problem. She was very concerned with Chen Changsheng. Even if he never emerged from the capital again and remained under the protection of the Orthodoxy, his mind being under such restrictions would have adverse effects on his cultivation.

On the other hand, Chen Changsheng was not concerned over these problems at all. He had already lived under a similar shadow for quite a few years. What he was even more concerned over was that the secret of his body might be known by even more people. Those words of his senior brother Yu Ren on that night had remained with him always: no one can resist this sort of temptation.

Xu Yourong assured him, "That won't happen."

Chen Changsheng thought it over and agreed with her view. The Demon Lord would probably keep this secret hidden.

It was just like a treasure submerged in the bottom of a lake. A person that knew of such information would definitely not talk about it wherever they went, but instead slowly and silently refloat it for themselves.

"Did it occur to you that the Demon Lord appearing in Mount Han might have been a plot?"

Xu Yourong seemed to have thought of something as she stared into his eyes and very seriously asked this.

Chen Changsheng, Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu had speculated in this direction, but they had failed to find any reasons for it, so he shook his head.

Xu Yourong stared into his eyes and asked, "Where is Principal Shang? Just what does he want to do? And what does His Holiness want to do?"

Chen Changsheng didn't want to continue this line of questioning, so he fell silent.

Xu Yourong also fell silent.

After an unknown amount of time had passed, she suddenly said, "Let's tell this matter to the Empress."

Chen Changsheng looked into her eyes, still silent.

Xu Yourong calmly stared back with no intention of yielding. "If this is a plan of His Holiness and Principal Shang, then only the Empress can break it."

Without hesitation, Chen Changsheng replied, "I trust His Holiness."

Xu Yourong replied, "Then Principal Shang?"

Chen Changsheng did not reply. He got up and went to the table to pour himself a cup of tea.

Xu Yourong gazed at his back, a hint of pity flashing through her eyes. "Everyone believes that you are the successor of the Orthodoxy, naturally meant to stand opposed to the Empress, but did you ever think that if you were to change your point of view, the scenery might be completely different?"

Chen Changsheng knew that she was not persuading him on the behalf of the Divine Empress, she was just worried about him, but he could not say anything.

Just as was said in that conversation in the Orthodox Academy between him and Tang Thirty-Six, every person had their own responsibility.

He was an infant drifting on a river that his master had picked up

and raised into an adult, educated into a respectable person. After arriving at the capital, he was watched over and nurtured by Archbishop Mei Lisha and received the high regard of the Pope. He had obtained far too many things from the Orthodoxy, so he had to bear the corresponding responsibility. Moreover...

"I don't trust the Empress," he calmly declared with his back turned to Xu Yourong and a teacup in his hands.

"Why?" Xu Yourong stood up and continued to ask, "Because the Empress is a woman, not a man?"

Chen Changsheng gazed at the cup in his hands as he replied, "No, because she is not a good person."

The matter concerned the throne of the Great Zhou and the inheritance of the Orthodoxy, they discussed powerful figures that had persisted in the world for many years, yet they spoke of 'man' and 'woman', 'good' and 'bad'. If other people were to hear this conversation, they would certainly deride the young man and woman of this conversation as too childish, naive, laughable.

But they spoke with great solemnity.

Xu Yourong knew that Chen Changsheng was just this sort of person.

She herself was this sort of person.



The room became quiet. For a long period, neither person spoke.

This was the first time that the two of them had formally discussed this sort of question. They had never spoken of it before because of their so-called 'factional dispute'.

"To me, the Empress...is just like a mother."

Xu Yourong's voice rose up once more, rather faint, but dense with emotion.

With regards to the relationship between the Tianhai Divine Empress and Xu Yourong, many people, Chen Changsheng included, could not understand just where this love and trust had arisen from. It was only when the Burning Heaven Sword concealed in Su Li's letter soared into the sky and clashed with the Wooden Sword Little Phoenix in the night above the capital that everyone knew the true reason: as it turned out, the Divine Empress also possessed the blood of the Heavenly Phoenix. From this aspect, Xu Yourong was her true successor, one that was even more important than her own son.

"But she is not a good person." Chen Changsheng stared into Xu Yourong's eyes as he calmly and firmly said, "So I will not trust her."

Xu Yourong asked him softly, "What determines what's good or evil?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I don't want to argue with you, and I don't have a complete grasp on those arguments about good and evil. I only know that she has killed many innocents."

Ever since she took the reins of power several centuries ago, the number of people that had died at the hands of the Tianhai Divine Empress was too great to be counted. There were members of the Imperial clan, members of the Orthodoxy's conservative faction, greedy and corrupt officials, and lawbreaking criminals, but nobody could deny that in this course of events, she had killed many people that should not have been killed.

"Martial Uncle Su also killed many people. Although only by accident, the number of innocents that died to his sword is also not small."

"Intentionally or unintentionally, that seems to me a very big difference."

"Then what evidence do you have, that you can be so sure that those innocents were intentionally killed by the Empress?"

"Because of Zhou Tong." Chen Changsheng looked into her eyes and said, "Zhou Tong is a man of pure evil. He finds enjoyment in cruelty, interest in tormenting all living things. From the day the Empress began using this man, it became impossible to say that she unintentionally committed evil."

After a moment of silence, Xu Yourong replied, "Do you have to assign all of Zhou Tong's crimes to the Empress? This is rather

unfair."

Chen Changsheng replied, "If the dog's owner doesn't tie up their dog and the dog bites someone, it's certainly the owner's crime. When using a knife to kill a person, it's naturally the wielder of the knife that is at fault."

The whole world knew that Zhou Tong was an evil dog raised by the Empress, a sharp knife.

Xu Yourong looked into his eyes, saying, "You're willing to defend Martial Uncle Su, but you won't empathize with the Empress. In the end, it's still prejudice."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Just how many people Senior Su Li killed in the Longevity Sect and Xunyang City, I did not see, but... the slaughters performed by the Empress and Zhou Tong in the capital are all written down in books, and I've read those books. I know that those words were all written in blood, very striking."

Silence reigned once more. For a long time, the two did not speak.

## Chapter 575 – A Night Like Candied Dates

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"In the future, if something really does happen in the capital, what will you do?"

Xu Yourong walked to the window, her two arms wrapped around her chest. As she gazed outside at the stars reflected in the lake, her voice also became much lighter.

Chen Changsheng replied, "I cultivate the way of following my heart. If matters come, I will naturally move according to my heart."

Xu Yourong did not turn around. After a moment of silence, she asked, "And if the one to come was me?"

Chen Changsheng very seriously considered this question but found that he could not imagine such a scene and could not make any sort of conclusion in advance. "I don't know."

The Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had constructed the ten-odd houses with great care, especially the one that Chen Changsheng dwelled in. Opening the window, one would be able to see the lake. In addition, outside the window was a path of wooden planks. If one followed this path, one would reach the shallows of the lake. In the shallow waters under the stars, there were currently several black fish swimming about.

Xu Yourong walked along this path of planks. On the wooden deck at the very end, she took off her shoes and blouse and walked

into the limpid and shallow waters.

Those black fish showed no fear of humans. Not only did they not flee in fright, they even surrounded her, slowly swimming around her snow-white feet. It was a very beautiful scene.

As Chen Changsheng looked at her in the water, he felt her back to be somewhat lonely, and then he felt somewhat puzzled. Logically, as she was the Holy Maiden of the south, neither the Elder of Heavenly Secrets nor Mao Qiuyu should have hidden things from her, but all the way until tonight, she had been unable to completely confirm that the middle-aged scholar was the Demon Lord?

Their conversation just now had diluted many emotions and he did not wish for things to develop in this fashion, so he voiced his doubts.

"When the Demon Lord broke through Mount Han's Heavenstone array, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets suffered heavy injuries. He is still not recovered, so I did not meet him."

"Principal Mao then?"

"He is the Pope's arm, he certainly won't make things too convenient for me."

In the end, it was still a problem of factions. Chen Changsheng thought that Linghai Zhiwang, as a representative of the

Orthodoxy's new faction, had assuredly already defected to the Divine Empress, so why had he not told her?

He had not asked this question, but Xu Yourong knew what he was thinking.

She extended her hand in the water, playing around with those small fish. She seemingly casually replied, "He and Tianhai Chenwu asked Xiao De to deal with you, which displeases me, so I ignored him."

Hearing that she was unhappy about that matter, Chen Changsheng became very happy. He also walked down the path of planks to reach the shallows of the lake.

The slightly chilly water slowly rose up and down, the fine and soft silver grains of sand comfortable beneath his feet.

"The Daoist Canon says that the Heaven Lake is formed from hot springs, so why is this water a little cold?"

"The water in the center of the lake is much hotter. I hear that the water where the two hottest springs bubble forth is so hot that it can cook eggs."

"That sounds very interesting. Do you want to find some time to try it?"

"Just because it can cook eggs?"

"Yeah, it seems very convenient."

"Do you know how to make rice and cook?"

"I do...didn't you eat it in the Garden of Zhou?"

"Yeah...then I should learn how to cook."

"The cafeteria of the Orthodox Academy is quite good."

"The skill of the chefs of Clear Lake Restaurant is naturally extraordinary, but I can't return to the capital from South Stream Temple every day to eat."

"Did the White Crane come with you this time? Do you want to ask it what it thinks about this?"

"The White Crane has always liked you. If it were to know that you had this sort of idea, it would presumably change its mind."

"I'm just casually talking."

"Ah, casually talking, eh?"

"Ah, I'm being serious."

He and she stood side by side in the lake below the house, gazing at the profuse stars in the night sky, casually chatting until gradually their voices ceased.

They stood quietly for a very long time with no words.

Different from the quiet in the room before, this sort of quiet was beautiful.

Because his arm gently leaned against hers. Occasionally, they would part ever so slightly and then quickly come together again.

Neither knew which was going and which was coming back.

After a long time had passed, probably because they were tired of standing, the two sat down on the wooden deck.

Xu Yourong took a small cloth bag from her sleeve and took something out of it.

Chen Changsheng did not notice. Pointing at a pitch-black stone in the lake, he asked, "That's a Heavenstone?"

Xu Yourong's voice was somewhat indistinct. "Yes."

Chen Changsheng turned to look at her, asking, "How have you been comprehending those stones?"



He also had stones, stones that were even more important than the Heavenstones of Mount Han, because those stones were Heavenly Tome Monoliths.

His purpose in participating in the Boiling Stone Summit was never to comprehend the Heavenstones and advance in cultivation, but to see her.

Unpredictably, his ten thousand li journey was safe and uneventful, yet after entering Mount Han, he encountered such a major event.

"There's been no progress at the moment, I'm just taking it slowly."

Xu Yourong's body slightly leaned backwards and she used her hands to prop herself against the deck while her bare feet lightly slapped against the water. She was very cute.

"I'm in a bit of a rush...after meeting the Demon Lord."

When he thought of those gory scenes on the mountain path, Chen Changsheng's heart throbbed with fear.

Xu Yourong understood his feelings. "To encounter such an unearthly expert and survive, there will always be some benefit."

Chen Changsheng softly voiced his agreement, then said, "I just didn't think that the Demon Lord would be so terrifying, that the

distance would be so vast."

Back in Xunyang City, Zhu Luo's attacks had basically all been blocked by Wang Po.

However, in this confrontation with the Demon Lord, Liu Qing and Xiao De actually didn't even seem close to being able to retaliate.

Xu Yourong replied, "It's only natural that the Demon Lord be much stronger than Zhu Luo. There's one more important point: Wang Po is much stronger than Liu Qing and Xiao De."

Chen Changsheng was confused, thinking, Liu Qing is a peak Star Condensation assassin, and Xiao De is the fifth-ranked expert of the Proclamation of Liberation. Although Wang Po is first ranked on the Proclamation of Liberation, how can he be said to be much stronger than them?

"Wang Po is a very extraordinary person—you can't use common sense to understand him," Xu Yourong seriously explained.

From a rational standpoint, it was impossible for Chen Changsheng to accept the fact that Wang Po was stronger than Liu Qing and Xiao De combined, but he was very willing to accept it from an emotional standpoint.

"Besides the Demon Lord, what other formidable people do the demons have?"

"I hear that the Demon Commander is very strong. There are also those Demon Generals; you should have seen them on the snowy plains."

When Chen Changsheng thought of those mountainous figures in the distance on the snowy plains, he inadvertently shook his head.

Even with his current level of strength, he was still a far cry from fighting with those powerful enemies.

"Without leaving the capital, it really is difficult to realize that the world has so many formidable people."

"You're also very formidable. At the very least, when the Demon Lord was your age, he definitely wouldn't have been able to beat you."

"I feel...that these words can also apply to you."

"That's what I meant the entire time."

"....."

"What's wrong?"

"It's nothing."

Chen Changsheng longed to say, "Your voice is very nice to hear, sweet and sticky like you're sucking on a candied date."

With a plop, Xu Yourong spit something into the lake. The thing slowly sank into the lake, stirring up the black fish into nibbling at it.

The lake water was very clear. Chen Changsheng carefully examined it and realized that what she had spit out was a date pit.

Those black fish realized that this was not food and, losing all interest, swam off. Xu Yourong thought that this was very interesting. Kicking up her legs, she began to happily laugh.

"Eh..." Seeing this sight, Chen Changsheng couldn't help but scratch his head.

Xu Yourong came to her senses. This place was not a deserted and serene peak, nor was it the mahjong table in the small village.

At her side sat a young man.

She felt her face grow hot. She subconsciously pulled out the silk bag from her sleeve that she used to hold snacks and offered it to him, whispering, "Do you want to eat some?"

At this time, her mouth had no date pit, but her voice was still

rather sticky, because she was rather embarrassed.

She lowered her head, not even looking at Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng looked at her eyelashes, her delicate skin, her rosy lips, and for a moment, he went dumb.

He thought to himself, why can I only think of such dull descriptors?

He took the silk bag, removed a similar snack, and without even looking, threw it into his mouth.

"What's wrong?" Xu Yourong raised her head and glanced at him.

Chen Changsheng was a very honest person. He said to her seriously, "You're really beautiful."

Xu Yourong felt a little bashful and lowered her head. After a moment, she raised it once more and asked him, "Which is more beautiful, the me now or the me in the Garden of Zhou?"

Just like all girls, even though she was the Holy Maiden, at this sort of moment, they would always ask some silly questions.

Of course, 'silly' here was describing her actions in asking this question, but it didn't mean that the question itself was very easy to answer.

When Xu Yourong had entered the Garden of Zhou, she had come as a disciple of the Thirteen Divisions of Radiant Green. She had disguised herself and her appearance then had been quite ordinary.

The current her was acknowledged by the world as the most beautiful young woman.

But if Chen Changsheng were to very sincerely say that the her now was more beautiful, he would definitely be giving the wrong answer.

In reality, this was like that eternally difficult problem of the Luo River, very difficult to form an answer for, and even concealing even more complex trials and dangers.

This question simply had no correct answer. Whether or not Chen Changsheng's answer satisfied completely depended on her mood.

Chen Changsheng was not skilled at lying. Miraculously, he himself had already seriously considered this question and had long since made his conclusion.

"They're both beautiful, but different kinds of beauty."

He answered Xu Yourong with all sincerity.

These words from his heart, the truth.

Xu Yourong was very happy.

He saw that she was happy and also became very happy.

It would be fine if they could just keep sitting like this, the lake before them, the mountain behind, and the splendorous stars above.

You are right next to me.

Yet can we stay together forever?

A cloud came from somewhere and blocked off a region of stars to the south, casting a shadow on the lake.

A shadow also appeared in Chen Changsheng's heart.

"I've been hiding something from you."

"You've talked about it before."

"Have I talked about it?"

"Mm."

"I forgot...do you want to know?"

"Every person should have their own secrets, I also have mine. In addition, I don't want to let you know of my secret, so."

"Eh, I suddenly realize that I really want to tell this secret to you."

"Just because you want to know my secret?"

"Yes."

"Chen Changsheng, you aren't some gossiping housewife in the marketplace. Why are you so interested in prying into the secrets of another?"

"Mmm...perhaps because I cultivate the path of following my heart?"

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For a couple passionately in love, even if they repeated the same line three hundred times, they wouldn't get bored.

To them, talking itself was not that important. What was



important was that they were speaking with each other.

However, to listeners, listening to words with similar meanings so many times truly was quite unbearable. The sweeter and more honeyed the words, the more unbearable it was.

At this moment, Tang Thirty-Six was feeling quite unbearable. He felt that he had eaten too much for dinner and wanted to vomit. On the only path on the side of the house facing the mountain, he was sitting down with his legs crossed, the Wenshui Sword sitting across his knees and a stalk of grass in his mouth. His face was one of grief and indignation as he thought to himself, truly a fine pair of adultering \*\*\*\*.

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# Chapter 576 – The Kind Words Of The Elder Of Heavenly Secrets

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After waking up early in the morning on the next day, Tang Thirty-Six, with two deep black bags around his eyes, went to find Chen Changsheng.

"What happened with you?" Chen Changsheng was very concerned over his health.

Tang Thirty-Six was very exhausted, saying, "Keeping watch is an exhausting job. Can you guys sleep a little earlier next time?"

Hearing this, Chen Changsheng felt rather embarrassed and also somewhat guilty. He said, "It's just for a few days."

"A few days?" Tang Thirty-Six's volume suddenly increased as he angrily roared, "In the capital, you also said it was just a few days, and now it's still just a few days! Then tell, just how many days is a few days? Just how many! Just how long do you plan to hide this matter?"

Chen Changsheng was speechless.

Tang Thirty-Six said to him with unbearable bitterness, "Just count this as me asking you to quickly tell the entire world. Holding and protecting secrets is truly too painful."

Chen Changsheng said soothingly, "I also empathize with what you're experiencing, but..."

Hearing the word 'empathize', Tang Thirty-Six instantly became furious. He yelled, "What? Empathize with what I'm experiencing? \*\*\*\* your empathy! \*\*\*\*your experience! This is all your concern! It doesn't have shit to do with me! You're the one obtaining all the benefits! The snow of the Orthodox Academy, the wind of Mount Han's peak, but you let me suffer! If you have the capability, give me that date and let me eat it!"

Chen Changsheng had originally felt thoroughly ashamed, but upon suddenly hearing the word 'date', he instantly grew alert. Staring back, he questioned, "What did you say?"

Tang Thirty-Six realized that he had made a slip of the tongue, but he was in no way ready to concede defeat. "What's up? I can't even get a little benefit from helping you keep watch?"

Chen Changsheng felt very helpless, saying, "Didn't we already discuss this at the start, that it's improper to listen, improper to look?"

Tang Thirty-Six feigned shock, saying, "[You molested her?](#)"

(TN: The word for 'improper' used in the previous line, 非礼, can also mean 'molestation' or 'harassment'.)

At this time, Zhexiu walked in. Seeing their combative stances, he asked, "You're going to fight?"

"No." Tang Thirty-Six used a ladder to descend, explaining, "I asked him to help me check on where my idol went, but now it turns out that he refuses to tell me."

The idol he spoke of was Liu Qing.

After the successive departures of Su Li and the enigmatic woman, the once third-ranked assassin in the world was now probably the number one assassin on the Ranking of Assassins.

But even the chief assassin was still an assassin, the number one killer still a killer, unable to be exposed to the light of day.

Just as Zhexiu once said, an assassin participating in the Boiling Stone Summit was seeking his own death.

Chen Changsheng had once asked that steward of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets to assist him in smoothing things over, but not long after the steward had agreed, the Demon Lord had rendered him into pearls of blood on the floor.

Thinking of how Liu Qing had been severely injured by the Demon Lord and his very unique identity, the three couldn't help but be concerned.

Within the Heaven Lake was an island, its garden pervaded and surrounded by warm mists that never lifted. Staying on that island was not necessarily comfortable, but it greatly assisted in

recovering from injuries. Especially after being wounded by the biting cold of demon techniques, one could recover very quickly here.

At this time, Liu Qing was on this island, recovering from his injuries.

He did not need the concern of Chen Changsheng and his friends, and even less needed them to request the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets to release him.

The Ranking of Assassins was issued by the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, but very few people noticed the significance of this fact.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets sat across from Liu Qing and asked, "What do you plan to do now that Su Li has left?"

Liu Qing was not a member of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, but he had done many things on its behalf.

In fact, even Su Li had done quite a few things for the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets back then.

Liu Qing considered the question, finally replying, "If Sir does not oppose, I want to go to the capital."

"Go to the capital for what?"

"Kill Tianhai."

"Then, I oppose."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets calmly said to him, "The Empress is my good friend, and I also don't want to send you to your death."

Liu Qing replied, "Then let's put it aside for the time being."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets suddenly asked, "Chen Changsheng...just what sort of person is he?"

Liu Qing very seriously pondered this for a very long time, finally saying, "He is a good person."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets slightly arched his brows, rather surprised by this answer.

Whether it was Su Li, Liu Qing, or even himself, none of them were good people.

What they loathed the most were so-called good people.

But when Liu Qing said that Chen Changsheng was a good person, he did not spy any ridicule or teasing on Liu Qing's face, only earnestness and respect.

This answer was very important, at least to the Elder of Heavenly Secrets.

"Since this little fellow has such kindness towards the world, I suppose I'll represent the world and return him some kindness."

"When did Sir ever have something like kindness?"

"On the verge of death, even the words are kind, let alone one's intentions."

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A boat floated on the surface of the lake, breaking through the fog. It seemed like it was traveling through a fairyland.

Chen Changsheng could clearly sense that the fog and water contained some sort of defensive array. As he passed the small isles in the lake, he could see the bowing disciples of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets.

It didn't take long before he arrived at the island in the very center of the lake. This place was also the warmest place in all of this cold mountain range. It could even be described as blazing hot.

As he walked amongst the warm mist and stepped on the slippery

flagstones, several questions bubbled up in his mind. Why was the Elder of Heavenly Secrets in such a rush to see him? Putting aside the fact that he had just awakened from a coma, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets should have also have suffered significant injuries. As he thought about these questions, he gradually forgot about the stifling heat around him.

Upon arriving at the garden and seeing the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, he finally understood a few things. Although he still had no answer, he had a clue. Last year in the summer, the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had sent an old steward to examine the Stainless Sword in the Orthodox Academy. As it turned out, the old steward had been the Elder of Heavenly Secrets himself.

This being the case, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets had naturally not come to examine a sword, but to examine a person, to examine him.

The steward responsible for guiding Chen Changsheng respectfully invited him in, and then quietly retreated.

Chen Changsheng quietly sat down, just like an obedient junior.

If this were two years ago, he would have found it impossible to remain calm before such an important figure as the Elder of Heavenly Secrets.

But now, he had already met far too many legendary figures, even legends like the Demon Lord and Wang Zhice.



The Elder of Heavenly Secrets noticed that even as Chen Changsheng walked through such stifling hot mist, his collar remained close to his neck and his clothes remained meticulous. He was satisfied at this.

"I've met countless heroes, but you aren't one bit lacking compared to any of them."

There were no pleasantries or attempts to sound each other. This important figure, currently the oldest man in the entire continent, had begun the conversation. The Elder of Heavenly Secrets looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "I've also seen many mountains. The one that I like the most has always been Mount Feiya by the Eastern Sea, and it was that mountain that was awarded to me by the Divine Empress after I went to see you in the capital."

Only at this point did Chen Changsheng realize that a few transactions had been concealed behind this matter, and he was stunned.

It was known throughout the world that the Elder of Heavenly Secrets possessed an unimaginably supreme intelligence and a world-shaking calculation ability. In the eyes of many, if there really existed a person that could see through fate, that person was undoubtedly the Elder of Heavenly Secrets. The Divine Empress had invited the Elder of Heavenly Secrets to examine him and sent off an entire mountain, but this price could not be considered large.

He naturally wanted to know just what secrets the Elder of Heavenly Secrets had seen on his body at the time. However, even

though he was the future Pope, before the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, he was still only a junior, and the tempo of this conversation was not under his control. He had many questions to ask this elder, but the elder also had many questions to ask him.

"Since the Demon Lord did not leave in the beginning, why did he leave later on?" the Elder of Heavenly Secrets asked.

After Chen Changsheng awoke, this was the question that most concerned Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu, because for him to be able to survive was an utterly inconceivable matter.

Even if the Elder of Heavenly Secrets could calculate the world, he still could not calculate just how he had managed to survive.

This was because he could not calculate that Wang Zhice was still alive and had, in that moment, appeared in Mount Han, appeared in front of that cliff.

Chen Changsheng had promised the old man that he would not reveal this matter to others. Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu were an accident, Xu Yourong was an exception.

Although the Elder of Heavenly Secrets was an exalted existence who was many generations his predecessor, he was not an accident nor an exception, so Chen Changsheng said nothing, only shook his head.

This was a very straightforward approach. The Elder of Heavenly

Secrets was not angered. He only quietly gazed at him in thought, his eyes calm and incredibly perceptive, seemingly able to see through all secrets. "If you don't wish to speak of how you survived, then can you speak on why the Demon Lord wants to kill you?"

Chen Changsheng thought, the Demon Lord did not come to kill me, then he shook his head again.

It was still the very straightforward approach. He did not wish to discuss this matter because it involved his greatest secrets and fears.

"Perhaps you don't know of what happened afterwards. When the Demon Lord returned to Xuelao City, he was already heavily wounded."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets paused here, as if giving him some time to receive and absorb the shock from this information.

Chen Changsheng really was shocked. The Demon Lord was heavily injured? Just what had he encountered after breaking through Mount Han's Heavenstone array?

"He encountered His Majesty the White Emperor."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets did not give him too much time to speculate, straightaway saying, "Or to put it more precisely, the White Emperor had been waiting in the snowy plains for him the

entire time."

Upon hearing this, Chen Changsheng's heart slowly sank. Even in this garden at the center of the island that still seemed gripped in the warmth of spring, he felt a sliver of cold.

"This being the case, the Demon Lord leaving Xuelao City and coming to Mount Han to kill you had already been calculated by someone. He...fell into a trap."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets calmly looked into his eyes, saying, "But I have no knowledge of this trap, and the Empress also does not know. Then, do you know of it?"

Chen Changsheng was rather absent-minded at this moment, subconsciously shaking his head at these words.

During this conversation, he had shaken his head three times, but this time was completely different from the last two times. He was somewhat frustrated, somewhat uneasy, somewhat unwilling to continue thinking about it.

However, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets still gazed into his eyes, his voice still continuing.

"Since this was a trap, the architect of this trap was naturally certain that there was something on your body that the Demon Lord had to obtain, even in the face of enormous risk. Just what is on your body? Just how many people in the world know of this

matter? You don't need to answer, but I advise you to think about it very carefully."

Chen Changsheng lowered his head. For a very long time, he said not a word.

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# Chapter 577 - To Peel Or Not To Peel, That Is The Question

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A scant few people knew the secret of his blood. In the Garden of Zhou, that Demon General couple and the shaman elder had all died, monsters could not speak human language, and after Nanke told her father, she would also assuredly keep this secret. Yourong would naturally not tell anyone else, so that only left...his master and Senior Yu Ren.

Last night, Xu Yourong had truthfully already warned him, but he was not willing, or perhaps did not dare, to think about it, so he did not respond.

But both he and Xu Yourong were keenly aware that this problem still existed. Just because he didn't respond didn't mean he could turn a blind eye to it.

Today, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets had directly torn up the window paper, forcing him to confront this problem and find an answer.

If this really was a trap to assassinate the Demon Lord, then was it really his teacher and Senior Yu Ren that had arranged it?

Chen Changsheng suddenly raised his head and asked the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, "What was the final result?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets slightly raised his brows, surprised

that this youth could calm down in such a short time.

"I said before, when the Demon Lord returned to Xuelao City, he was already heavily wounded.""

"I am speaking of both sides."

"The White Emperor also suffered considerable injuries. He will at least require several years to recover, but the Demon Lord's injuries were worse."

"Based on my knowledge, in Xuelao City, the Demon Commander and Black Robe have always been like fire and water, but it's always been forcefully suppressed by the Demon Lord. With the Demon Lord now heavily injured, doesn't that mean that his grasp over the entire demon realm, especially his suppression of these two individuals, has become weaker?"

"You can say that."

"Whether it's the Divine Empress, His Holiness, or the Venerable Senior, what most concerns all of you is whether the demons will break the confluence of the north and south, right?"

"Correct."

"If their internal situation is not stable, presumably, the demons will have little mind to turn to breaking the confluence of the north and south."

"That's reasonable."

"The humans and demi-humans will obtain an extremely precious period of integration, and the entire state of affairs of the continent will begin shifting towards us?"

"Yes."

After this conversation, the garden once more fell quiet.

After a long time had passed, Chen Changsheng declared, "Then it's enough."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets arched his brows, asking, "Enough?"

"Yes, I might have just been bait and nearly died, but if it was in exchange for so many benefits, then...it's enough."

Chen Changsheng gazed at the Elder of Heavenly Secrets and seriously said.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets looked into his eyes. He saw no falseness, no reluctance, only sincerity.

"Even if you're being used by someone else?"



"Yes, even I'm being used."

"Are you not angry because of this?" the Elder of Heavenly Secrets asked.

Chen Changsheng thought about this for a moment, then replied, "Yes, I'm very angry, or perhaps sad. In the future, I will find an opportunity to ask him."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets understood his meaning and knew that he would not say the name of the planner. "Every person has their own choice to make, I just hope that you won't regret it."

Chen Changsheng replied, "In truth, I've never understood why all of you want to me to choose."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets thrust his hand into the mist and, through some magic trick, took out a basket of peaches.

These peaches were all plump, pink, fresh and tender, looking extremely captivating.

He took a peach from the basket and offered it to Chen Changsheng, along with a small knife.

Chen Changsheng very naturally took the knife and began to carefully peel the peach.

There was no sound as the peach was peeled and the garden was very quiet. It didn't take long before he had finished peeling the peach and courteously passed it to the Elder of Heavenly Secrets.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets shook his head, gazing at him as he indifferently said, "When eating a peach, to peel or not to peel, this is a sort of choice."

The hand of Chen Changsheng's that was holding the peach froze in midair.

"If it were me eating a peach, I would not peel it, because the peel has nutrients. But because I was thinking that Sir would eat it, and thinking of how elders' digestion is not as good, I felt peeling it was more suitable."

This was his explanation.

To the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, this was meaningless.

"No matter who the target is or what difference exists between the choices, in the end, you still made a choice."

"So?"

"Sweet or salty, to peel or not to peel, to live or to die—these have always been questions."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets looked into his eyes, his voice calm. "Life is formed of innumerable choices. Who can avoid them completely?"

Chen Changsheng asked, "But what should one do if none of the choices is in accord with one's heart?"

"When the Demon Lord was blocking all of you on the mountain path, as the master of Mount Han, I could have made two different responses, but whether it was activating the Heavenstone array and trapping both him and all of you in Mount Han, forcing you into desperate straits, or disregarding the Demon Lord and first saving all of you, to me, neither of them was a perfect solution."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets ended, "When I finally made the choice, I still relied on my heart."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Not conforming with your heart, but in the end, you still acted according to your heart?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets replied, "When the sky is shattering and stars are falling, when you find it simply impossible to make any sort of rational judgment and can only rely on what your heart is feeling at that moment, that is what your heart truly feels."

After a long period of silence, Chen Changsheng replied, "I understand."

"Every person will have to confront their own multiple-choice questions and give their own answers. I chose to activate the Heavenstone array, letting you and Tang Tang and all the rest die together with the Demon Lord, and this was in accord with my heart. Although it wasn't fair to all of you, I would not feel guilty, and I believe that nobody would blame me either, because the Demon Lord's life is worth more than all your lives added together."

"I don't have too many complaints about this."

"Even against the planner?"

"I only feel...they should have told me in advance, maybe...this would have made me feel better, not feel that I was purely being used."

"Every person can only take responsibility for their own choices. I do not understand what the planner is thinking, but to you, I wish to give some compensation."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets gazed at him and calmly said, "I advise you to seize this opportunity."

Upon hearing this, Chen Changsheng was somewhat shocked, and also somewhat perplexed.

With the status of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets in the continent,

these words of his were the greatest temptation to any cultivator.

Whether it was gold and silver, money and treasure, secret cultivation manuals, divine weapons and artifacts, or even famous mountains and great rivers, the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets could provide it.

However, Chen Changsheng was not lacking in these. He had the Halving Blade Style, the secrets of the Mount Li Sword Style, his status as successor to the Pope, the Heavenly Tome Monoliths, and also Tang Thirty-Six.

What could the Elder of Heavenly Secrets give to him? That is to say, in what aspect was the Elder of Heavenly Secrets the most outstanding?

It was wisdom, experience, his understanding of the world, and countless secrets unknown to others.

"I would like to ask Sir for instruction on a few questions."

Chen Changsheng's heart was set as he spoke to the Elder of Heavenly Secrets.

This answer had clearly not surpassed the expectations of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets. He faintly smiled, the wrinkles on his face deepening.

"Who am I."

This was the first question Chen Changsheng asked.

This was also the third question when starting from the end of the 'Essay on the Origin of the Dao'.

From ancient times until now, innumerable experts and masters would cultivate to the peak and then afterwards look around at a loss in search of this answer.

This was an extremely famous question in the ten debates held between that Pope of divine and scholarly erudition and the Demon Grand Scholar Tong Gusi.

This was a metaphysical question, a philosophical question, a question that had already entered the scope of the Dao.

But the Elder of Heavenly Secrets knew that Chen Changsheng's question truthfully did not pay much attention to all that. It was very straightforward, very simple.

He just wanted to know—just 'who am I'.

# Chapter 578 - Who Am I

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Who was Chen Changsheng?

He was a child of the river picked up by Daoist Ji from the middle of a stream.

He was a young Daoist from Xining engaged to the Heavenly Phoenix Xu Yourong.

He was the inheritor of the Orthodoxy, the successor of the Pope.

He was well-read in the Daoist Canon, of surpassing talent and a genius in the path of the sword.

But, just who exactly was he?

He stared into the eyes of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets and asked solemnly, "Am I Crown Prince Zhaoming?"

In the past year, this had been one of the most controversial and also most secretive of rumors in the capital.

No one knew the answer.

Everyone said that there was nothing that the Elder of Heavenly Secrets did not know. Then did he know of this?

This question was very straightforward and abnormally cold and stern, just like Su Li's sword or Wang Po's blade.

Even though the Elder of Heavenly Secrets had long since mentally prepared himself, his eyes still narrowed and he remained silent for a very long time.

After this long period of time, he finally spoke, "When the Empress requested for me to make a special trip to the capital to examine you, I also wanted to ask a similar question."

Chen Changsheng thought, this is also a question that I really want to know the answer to, so he said, "The result?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets replied, "There was no result, because...your and Crown Prince Zhaoming's ages do not match up."

Chen Changsheng did not relax at this reply for two reasons.

He had carefully calculated: even though his age did not match Crown Prince Zhaoming's, his senior brother Yu Ren's just so happened to. Moreover, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets had concealed some deeper meaning in his words. There was no result because the ages did not match. Then didn't this mean that from every other aspect, he should be Crown Prince Zhaoming?

"If your age really could match Crown Prince Zhaoming's, then



on the contrary, there would be something wrong with this matter."

"Why?"

"Because it's too correct."

Because it was too correct, so it was incorrect. This sounded rather mystifying, but Chen Changsheng could easily understand it. If his age really did match Crown Prince Zhaoming's, the rumor circulating throughout the capital would very easily become the truth and those thunderstorms hidden away would inevitably burst out, perhaps tearing apart the black curtain of the capital, perhaps exploding his body into powdered flesh and shattered bones.

The next words of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets directly jolted Chen Changsheng from his stupor and caused his body to go somewhat stiff.

"I know you have a senior brother, and his age is actually a match for Crown Prince Zhaoming."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets looked into his eyes and said, "There's no need to be nervous, I am not saying that he is Crown Prince Zhaoming."

Chen Changsheng asked, "Why?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets replied, "Because he is a complete match for Crown Prince Zhaoming."

Chen Changsheng didn't know what to say.

"I've always deeply admired Principal Shang's myriad Daoist techniques."

With a calm expression, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets said, "When the false is taken for true, the true becomes false, but it's a pity that this is not enough to deceive me."

Chen Changsheng did not ask what he could not be deceived about. At this moment, his mind was completely focused on other things.

He was thinking of a certain Daoist scripture. This Daoist scripture was called the Scroll of Time, and time...was age.

"Besides age...in other aspects, I'm a match for Crown Prince Zhaoming?"

"Yes, I'm very sure that you are a descendant of the Chen Imperial clan."

Upon hearing this, Chen Changsheng could no longer maintain his composure.

In the rumors and gossip that had been spreading throughout the capital for more than a year, before they spoke about how he might be Crown Prince Zhaoming, they naturally first brought up that he was a member of the Imperial clan.

"Why? Why is everyone so sure that I'm an Imperial? Is it just because my surname is Chen?"

He asked the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, not realizing that the pitch of his voice was somewhat higher than normal.

For him, his mind being in such a state of agitation was quite a rare sight.

The garden was pervaded by a thick mist, tightly isolating the sounds of their conversation within. Absolutely no one could eavesdrop on their words.

"How can I be sure you are of the Imperial clan?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets gazed at him, the expression in his eyes somewhat complex. "Because your body once contained a sun wheel."

"Sun wheel?"

Chen Changsheng was not completely unfamiliar with this term, even though it was scarcely mentioned after the Tianhai Divine Empress took control of the court and expelled all members of the

Imperial clan from the capital.

The reason the Chen Imperial clan had been able to emerge from Tianliang county and pacify the country, and the reason they could continuously produce peerless experts like Chen Xuanba and Emperor Taizong, was precisely that the bloodline of the Chen clan was different from the masses. Their methods of cultivation were different from all the other sects. Of course, the specific differences were naturally the greatest secret of the Imperial clan, but the term 'sun wheel' still remained.

Chen Changsheng recalled his experience cultivating after arriving in the capital, especially the countless times in which he had performed meditative introspection, then shook his head. "No, I've never found something like a sun wheel in my body."

"That's because a long time ago, the sun wheel in your body was destroyed. To be more precise, it exploded."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets quietly gazed at him. Perhaps he was seeing things, but Chen Changsheng felt that the elder's eyes seemed to be pitying him.

"How can that be? If it really is as Sir says, and my body really did contain a sun wheel that then exploded, why did I never feel it?"

"This is because when your sun wheel was destroyed, you were still an infant."

"...even if this is the case, why is it that no one has ever seen the traces of the sun wheel in my body? Why did Sir not discover it during Sir's last visit to the capital?"

Chen Changsheng still found it impossible to accept this conclusion, even if the one giving it was the Elder of Heavenly Secrets.

"Because at that time, your cultivation was not enough. Only after your cultivation gradually deepened and starlight entered your body, causing your meridians to show up more clearly, was I able to finally confirm it."

"Weren't we talking about the explosion of the sun wheel? When were meridians mentioned?"

"You...isn't it the case that your meridians are fractured and that you've always had problems circulating true essence?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets gazed at his eyes and asked.

Chen Changsheng was shocked speechless.

Just like his blood, the blockage, or fracturing, of his meridians was also one of his body's greatest secrets.

This secret was even more frightening, because based on what his master had said, this problem of his meridians would be the direct cause of his death at the age of twenty.

He did not expect for this secret to be so easily seen through by the Elder of Heavenly Secrets and then spoken aloud.

But...what did fractured meridians have to do with the claim that he was a member of the Imperial clan? What did it have to do with the sun wheel?

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets raised his right hand and pointed across the table at a certain place on Chen Changsheng's chest.

"When you were an infant, the sun wheel exploded at this position, then it spread out like a spider web and severed your nine meridians.

"You wish to ask what your fractured meridians have to do with the explosion of your sun wheel?

"Your fractured meridians are precisely the traces left behind by the explosion of the sun wheel, the most direct evidence.

"Of the countless people in the world, only your meridians can be damaged in this way.

"So you are a member of the Imperial clan.

"Of course, you are an extremely unfortunate member of the Imperial clan.

"Based on principle, when your sun wheel exploded, the infant you should have died.

"That you lived was in itself a sort of miracle."

The garden was quiet.

The mist was abnormally thick.

The spring warmth of the garden suddenly became as cold as the harsh winter.

For a long time, Chen Changsheng said nothing.

After this seemingly interminable silence, he asked the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, "But...I'll still die, won't I?"

This time, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets became silent.

# Chapter 579 - Life Is Precisely Countless

## Multiple-Choice Questions (I)

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The countless threads of wind on the lake, through some inexplicable means, passed through the array and gusted onto the scene, brushing the mist away and lowering the temperature.

A reflection of the moods of the two people conversing.

"My medical arts are inferior to Shang's, and also to Yin's."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets gazed at Chen Changsheng and said, "If those two had no means, then I also do not know how to begin."

Chen Changsheng gazed into the distance. Where the wind had scattered the mist, he could faintly make out the beautiful sight of the dark blue lake.

"However, based on my speculations, since this problem of yours lies in the fact that the explosion of your sun wheel when you were an infant caused your meridians to be blocked up, if you no longer attempt to cultivate, even completely disperse all the true essence in your body, perhaps you could barely maintain your present condition for a while, or at least...delay the breaking out of your injuries."

Upon hearing these words, Chen Changsheng drew back his gaze and asked, "Senior, what is the chance of success?"



The Elder of Heavenly Secrets had already spent a great deal of time calculating this when Chen Changsheng was in a coma, so he answered straightaway, "Twenty percent."

Twenty percent was a rather awkward number. If one said it was hope, it was a rather remote one. One could call it despair, yet a path forward was clearly visible.

Today, Chen Changsheng learned of many things, things that concerned him, yet the end of the path ahead was still a great shadow.

If it were anyone else, going back and forth between hope and despair might have already made them go insane, but he did not.

He even managed to very quickly escape from his previous mood and return to true calm.

The expression of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets did not change, but his mind tossed and turned with great waves—with this child's personality, if the heavens had not appointed him to such a fate, how could he not obtain the Great Dao?

Chen Changsheng's will truly was very frightening. With unimaginable speed, he had regained his composure, even forgetting the conversation that had just occurred.

Then, he asked a very childish and naive question.

"Senior, which side are you on?"

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If another person were to ask the Elder of Heavenly Secrets this sort of question, the end would assuredly be very miserable.

But Chen Changsheng's status was very special, whether it was his relationship to the Pope and Shang, or his possible relationship to the Divine Empress.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets actually gave him the answer in full detail.

"My relationship with the Li Palace has always been good, but my relationship with Yin is not. My relationship with your Zhou Empire is not good, but my relationship with the Empress is good."

"Then...if I really am Crown Prince Zhaoming...will the Divine Empress kill me?"

Chen Changsheng's following question was not only naive and childish, it was also somewhat excessive.

Even more excessively, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets actually

answered him once more.

"Given my understanding of the Empress, she ultimately will. She has already waited for two years, but she cannot wait forever."

"Why?"

"Have you heard of the rumor about defying the heavens and changing fate?"

"I've always believed that it was just a rumor."

"Rumors often arise from the truth, and at times, the truth may be even more bizarre than the rumor."

Chen Changsheng fell silent.

There had always been a rumor circulating across the continent.

Several hundred years ago, the Divine Empress was expelled from the Imperial Palace by Emperor Taizong. In the Hundred Herb Garden, she made two friends and comprehended the secret to defying the heavens and changing fate.

Those two friends were the current Pope and his master, the Principal of the Orthodox Academy, Shang Xingzhou.

The Divine Empress swore an oath to the starry sky that she was willing to sever her bloodline in exchange for the most extraordinary of achievements.

"The severing of a bloodline..." he murmured to himself.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets looked into his eyes and said serenely, "This fellow called fate has never made a one-time deal. Defying the heavens and changing fate has no such thing as an end. From the moment you offer sacrifices to the starry sky until the day you return to the sea of stars, it is being carried out at all times. If the Empress wishes to perfect her change of fate, she cannot have a single bloodline descendant."

"If she does?"

"If she does, then there is a gap in her fate which is simultaneously her greatest weakness."

"But...if I really am Crown Prince Zhaoming, then the Empress... she's my mother."

Chen Changsheng thought of this problem and his emotions were tinged by an irrepressible complexity.

The elder was calm, even somewhat cruel. "The Empress once had many sons and daughters, but they all died."

Chen Changsheng asked, "What about the Princess of Ping?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets answered, "Quite a few people, I included, know that the Princess of Ping is not the Empress's own daughter, but the princess herself does not know."

To suddenly hear this sort of information, Chen Changsheng was shocked beyond words. Then, he realized that many things that he did not understand were now answered.

Like how the Divine Empress had doted upon the Princess of Ping and taught her quite well.

Like how when the Princess of Ping wanted to vie for favor with Xu Yourong, she would always come out the loser.

"If one could say that the Empress had any descendant in the world, that could only be Xu Yourong."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets seemed to know what he was thinking. "Even though this is only a successor in terms of spirit and innate gift."

Chen Changsheng said nothing for a very long time, then asked, "Since Sir has a good relationship with the Empress, why is Sir telling me these secrets?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets replied, "Because I hope to assist you in making the right choice."

As he spoke, he glanced at the peach in Chen Changsheng's hands.

The peach had already been peeled for quite some time. Although the color of its flesh had not changed, it was no longer as fresh as it once was.

Chen Changsheng fell silent, then asked, "What can I choose?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets replied, "You can act like you know nothing, return to the capital, and then be killed by the Empress. Or else you can choose to leave, bury your name, and disappear from sight."

Chen Changsheng raised his head and asked the elder, "But why is it up to me to choose?"

"Because...I do not wish for the Empress to confront such a difficult multiple-choice question again." With immeasurable sorrow, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets sighed, "From the moment you entered the capital, she has always been hesitating, or else you would already be dead... A tiger eating her own son—there is nothing more tragic."

Chen Changsheng's nostrils flared and his breathing grew coarser.

Only those who knew him well understood that this was a sign that he was currently in an extremely poor mood.

In this period of around two years, he had rarely acted in this manner.

So Luoluo knew, Tang Thirty-Six knew, but not even Xu Yourong knew.

"Then what of the child devoured by the tiger? Of all the sons eaten by the tiger? Could they not be even more tragic and miserable?"

He looked into the eyes of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets as he spoke, "Moreover, it's not necessarily the case that I'm Crown Prince Zhaoming, and even if I am, it shouldn't be up to me to make the choice, it should be hers. Sir wants me to bury my name and disappear, but why can't she act like she knows nothing and do nothing?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets replied, "You've already appeared in the capital; how can she act like she did not see you? From the Orthodox Academy to the Ivy Festival, from Mei Lisha's announcement on the Divine Avenue of the Li Palace to first rank on the first banner of the Grand Examination, too many people have intentionally allowed the Empress to see you."

Chen Changsheng replied, "So what if she sees me?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets answered, "If you really are Crown Prince Zhaoming, then you are the most fatal gap in the Empress's changing of fate. If you stop over in the capital for another day, she

will see you for another day. To her, this is an unimaginable torment. If she just leaves you alone and disregards your existence, you will ultimately become the baneful star over her fate. Two years ago, on the night you fixed your Fated Star in the Orthodox Academy, many people actually sensed it, and in the past few days, I've constantly calculated and ultimately confirmed that I am not wrong."

After hearing this, Chen Changsheng fell silent.

The starry sky, fate—these things had all appeared on the Heavenly Tome Monoliths. Defying the heavens, changing fate—these things had been recorded in Wang Zhice's notebook. He had seen them before, read them before. He remembered very clearly that the lines formed by the stars on the Heavenly Tome Monoliths were not fixed, that on the opening page of Wang Zhice's notebook, he had written: there is no such thing as fate!

"There is no such thing as fate," he whispered.

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# Chapter 580 - Life Is Precisely Countless

## Multiple-Choice Questions (II)

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The Elder of Heavenly Secrets slightly creased his brow. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying...there is no such thing as fate."

Chen Changsheng raised his head, his eyes calm and resolute. "Then there's no naturally no such thing as a baneful star over one's fate."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets looked into his eyes and solemnly said, "Fate resides amongst the starry sky."

Chen Changsheng replied, "Then I invite Sir to first calculate and then tell me who I am and what I should do, instead of having me decide on my own what I should do."

"There are very few matters and people that I cannot calculate clearly, but you are one of them." His brow was suddenly tinged with the weathering of time as he spoke, "Because your teacher can conceal heavenly secrets, as can Black Robe. If this is their plot, I have no chance of breaking it."

Upon hearing the name of the Demon Military Advisor, Chen Changsheng's mood became somewhat peculiar. "...This matter is related to Black Robe?"

"If my expectations are not wrong, your arrival at the capital from Xining was a plot targeted at the Empress." Perhaps he had expended too much mental strength from advising Chen Changsheng, but the Elder of Heavenly Secrets seemed rather exhausted. "I cannot clearly calculate how they will act, but there is no doubt that it somehow relates to you."

Chen Changsheng fell silent once more.

He thought of the words Xu Yourong had said to him on that night.

He thought of the conversation Tang Tang had with him many days ago in the Orthodox Academy.

Those words, that conversation, and the opening remarks of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets all directly pointed at his teacher and the Pope.

"I...will not cooperate."

This was a very simple set of words, but it had taken a very long time until Chen Changsheng had been able to push them out of his lips.

Because this signified that he had begun to doubt his teacher and the Pope.

Perhaps his teacher and the Pope were using him for some grand

goal.

Just like this trap of Mount Han to heavily injure the Demon Lord.

He could endure it, but he didn't like it.

Once was enough, but not too many times.

"But...what if you've always been a part of this plot?

"What if you've always lived within this plot?

"What if your very existence is a plot?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets would not let the matter drop just because of his answer. Instead, he asked with extreme firmness, even cruelty, these three successive questions.

And it still had not ended. Several more questions slapped at Chen Changsheng's face like frigid sleet.

"If you really are Crown Prince Zhaoming, why did Principal Shang and the Pope have you enter the capital?

"Because they thought they could hide you from the Empress's intelligent eyes? No, perhaps they even deliberately let the

Empress see you, focus on you.

"Why? Could it be that they were sending you off to the Empress so she could kill you, thus completing her change of fate?

"Chen Changsheng, do not attempt to answer these questions, because when you do see the answers, you will assuredly be a part of an answer.

"Take advantage of the fact that all this has not yet occurred, leave, disappear, and don't let anyone else find you."

Chen Changsheng no longer wished to listen.

He stood up and said to the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, "In fact, if you wish to resolve this problem, there's an even simpler way."

"What?"

"Just kill me right now."

"No, I will not kill you."

"Why?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets gazed calmly back, saying, "Because I will not make the Empress's choice for her."

Chen Changsheng calmly looked back. "Then, I invite Sir to not make the choice for me."

After saying this, he remained no more. He turned and walked into the dense mist beyond the garden.

Gazing at his back, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets said with exhaustion, "Disappear, just like Su Li; this would be the greatest kindness to the world."

Chen Changsheng stopped, but he said nothing.

He took a bite out of the peach in his hands and ventured further into the mist.

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The mist gathered and dispersed. People came and went.

Not long after Chen Changsheng left, Xu Yourong came on a boat to the small island in the center of the lake and seated herself in the same position.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets commented, "In truth, before you and Chen Changsheng, there was another person sitting there."

Xu Yourong asked, "Who?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets replied, "Liu Qing."

Xu Yourong thought for a moment before remembering the name.

"I asked Liu Qing what sort of person Chen Changsheng was."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets continued, "He pondered this question for a very long time, then said to me...Chen Changsheng is a good person."

For a world-renowned assassin to give Chen Changsheng such an evaluation, Xu Yourong felt it a little miraculous.

"Then what about you? In your view, what sort of person is Chen Changsheng?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets gazed at her and calmly asked.

This question was asked too calmly. The old man's eyes were also too calm, calm as if he knew many secrets.

No one could tell Xu Yourong's mood. The white gauze drifted in the lake wind, almost becoming one with the mist.

The voice passing through the gauze was very gentle, very sure.

"He is a true person."

Upon hearing this, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets was slightly moved. He did not expect that Xu Yourong would have such a high evaluation of him.

When he thought of what had happened in these past two years and of the matters concerning Chen Changsheng's body, he realized that this evaluation was incredibly accurate.

"To be able to maintain a pure and innocent heart in this vulgar world is truly not easy."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets sighed, then declared, "Tell the Empress that if Chen Changsheng returns to the capital, kill him. Do not hesitate."

The former statement was one of praise, the latter an order to kill.

Officials filled the capital, every one of them wanting to kill.

The garden was very quiet, the sound of water slapping against the shore exceptionally vivid.

Xu Yourong said nothing, only stared at the elder.

The fluttering white gauze could obscure her sublime features, but it could not obstruct her calm and unyielding gaze.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets did not match gazes with her. He stood up and held his hands behind him as he gazed out at the mist-covered lake. His voice had no emotion as he said, "If you are unwilling, then take him away. Use love, use will, use the White Crane, use your childhood. Any method is fine. The farther you go, the better."

Xu Yourong stared at the elder's back and asked, "Just what has Sir calculated?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets did not turn around. "He was in a coma for three days and three nights, and so I calculated for three days and three nights, yet it is still a dense mist with only a ray of light."

Xu Yourong muttered, "Light?"

"This light is incomparably distinct, just like Su Li's sword."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets ended, "If he returns to the capital alive, the Empress will die. How will you choose?"

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Returning to the house, he stood at the balcony and gazed at the vast lake before him, but Chen Changsheng did not feel any sense of broad-mindedness.

He thought of the final words of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets—to leave, just like Su Li, would be the greatest kindness to the world.

Then where was this world's kindness to Senior Su Li? And where is the kindness to me?

Leaning against the balcony and facing the wind, he thought in silence for a very long time.

# Chapter 581 - Not Everything Is Fabricated

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The Demon Lord's appearance had placed an enormous pressure on Chen Changsheng. The secret of his body had been discovered and it was highly likely that he would have to confront the avaricious stares of the entire continent. The conversation on the island had placed upon him an even greater pressure. Similarly, it was also one of his body's secrets. The severed meridians would soon cause him to die, and this fact had also been discovered.

As it turned out, his fractured meridians had been ruptured by his sun wheel. As it turned out, he really was a descendant of the Chen Imperial clan. Then was he Crown Prince Zhaoming? If he really was a descendant of the Chen Imperial clan, then the encounter on the stream bank sixteen years ago was naturally no coincidence. His teacher had presumably long known of his background; did his senior brother know as well?

This was actually the source of his greatest pressure.

He had to begin confronting many matters head-on. If the appearance of the Demon Lord in Mount Han really was a trap, then it was possible that he had been discarded. If his going from Xining Village to the capital was also a trap, then what sort of role had he been ignorantly playing out?

In the past, whether he was applying for the Six Ivies or participating in the Grand Examination, no matter what sort of obstacles or challenges he faced, he was never too worried. This was because he believed that his real roots lay in Xining Village's old temple, that his true confidence was with his teacher and

senior. Now, he realized that everything might have been fabricated.

His trust was no longer as certain, so how could his Dao heart remain as tranquil?

If he could not even trust Senior Yu Ren, just who could he rely on in this world?

Chen Changsheng was often praised by others as possessing a calm and composure beyond his age, but he was still a sixteen-year-old youth in the end.

As matters had developed today, developed into this appearance, he finally found it hard to bear. In a daze, he gazed at the mist-covered surface of the lake, his heart rather melancholy.

The sound of footsteps could be heard on the balcony.

Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu had walked over.

They gazed at Chen Changsheng's back in concern.

Ever since Chen Changsheng had returned, he had not spoken. He seemed extremely reticent, even desolate. It was obvious that something had happened.

"Just what did the Elder of Heavenly Secrets say to you?"

In the end, Tang Thirty-Six could not hold himself back. Walking to his side, he asked this question.

Leaning against the balcony, Chen Changsheng still refused to open his mouth. He seemed rather frustrated.

Zhexiu suddenly said, "I don't believe that such a thing as an unsolvable problem exists in this world."

Chen Changsheng straightened himself and turned to look at him. He very seriously asked, "If there is, what then?"

Zhexiu's answer was extremely suitable to his personality. Simply and firmly, he replied, "At worst, just die."

On the side, Tang Thirty-Six added, "Moreover, even thinking about dying is often not that easy."

Chen Changsheng looked at the two of them and suddenly asked, "Do you believe or not believe that I am Crown Prince Zhaoming?"

When he didn't want to speak, he naturally wouldn't say a thing. In the end, however, he was still somewhat unwilling to ignore the matter, so he had opened his mouth and spoken, spoken about the most important matter.

At this question, Tang Thirty-Six glanced at Zhexiu, somewhat

nervous.

In fact, this sort of rumor had been spreading around the capital for a long time, but both he and Chen Changsheng himself found it complete nonsense, so they had not taken it seriously. But now that Chen Changsheng had so formally asked this question, this could only mean that the Elder of Heavenly Secrets and Chen Changsheng had spoken of this matter, moreover...it might even be true.

Zhexiu was still expressionless, offering no assistance whatsoever to Tang Thirty-Six.

Tang Thirty-Six's expression seemed to freeze, and then he smiled and said to Chen Changsheng, "What sort of nonsense are you pulling here? There's a difference of quite a few years."

Chen Changsheng did not smile. Quietly looking into his eyes, he asked, "Don't you often say that I've matured early, that I seem like an old man?"

"Maturing early means you can just pull a few years out of thin air? Then the early-maturing pigs of Black Mountain Swamp will always be higher than the rest of their species for the entirety of their lives?"

Tang Thirty-Six's face was brimming with derision.

Chen Changsheng was not angry to hear such a vulgar example,

nor did he laugh. He continued to seriously question, "If I am, what then?"

Tang Thirty-Six grew quiet, then replied seriously, "Even if you are, so what? Just treat it like a plate of pig ears, eaten cold and with sauce."

Chen Changsheng knew that he was advising him to ignore it, but..."Will the Divine Empress allow me to live?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "In the Garden of Zhou, was Nanke prepared to let you live? On the mountain path, was the Demon Lord prepared to let you live?"

Chen Changsheng understood his meaning and the frustration on his face seemed to lighten somewhat.

"Other people want you to die, but that doesn't mean that you need to die, no matter who it is—Nanke, the Demon Lord, or the Empress."

Tang Thirty-Six stared into his eyes and said, "Think positively. If you really are Crown Prince Zhaoming, then if you continue to live, you will be the first successor to the position of Emperor of the Great Zhou."

As he spoke, his expression was very serious, but the contents of his words were utterly lacking in seriousness.

He knew that Chen Changsheng had zero interest in something like the position of emperor, he just wanted to use these words to dilute the oppressive atmosphere.

"Now that I'm talking about it, which one is better, the Pope or Emperor of the Great Zhou?" he asked Chen Changsheng with a smile.

Chen Changsheng did not reply to this question, but Zhexiu did. This wolf youth that had always regarded worldly matters with extreme indifference somewhat clumsily voiced his opinion. "It's still better to be the emperor. Under your grasp is the army and thirty-eight Divine Generals. In the future, when going to war against the demons, you would be the commander-in-chief."

Truly excellent.

To have these sorts of friends was truly excellent.

Chen Changsheng thought to himself.

He didn't know whether Xining Village was fabricated, whether his own existence was fabricated, but at least he could now be sure that his days in the capital were incomparably real.

"Thank you," he said to Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu. He seemed to sense something and said, "I have some things I need to take care of first."

Zhexiu wasn't clear on what things he needed to take care of, but Tang Thirty-Six had easily guessed at it. This was especially the case when he sensed the ripple of Qi from his magical artifact and caught a glance of the dress flitting past the white sands and shallow waters below. This made him feel very depressed as he thought, this guy puts his lover over his friends.

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The date pit rested against the white sands amidst the limpid waters of the lake. Perhaps because it carried her Qi, this date pit had become an object that many fish in the lake were extremely willing to approach. Its surface had been nibbled clean, leaving it remarkably smooth. It looked just like a stone in which lines had been carved.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong sat on the wooden deck, their feet immersed in the lake. They weren't deliberately sitting close to each other, but their shoulders would occasionally lightly bump against each other.

This sort of distance, this sort of rhythm, this sort of calm were what they were most accustomed to, what they most enjoyed, just like their feelings toward each other.

Xu Yourong softly said, "To have friends like these is something very worthy of being happy about."



Chen Changsheng asked, "You...don't have these sorts of friends?"

Then he remembered that as a child, she had been doted on and cherished by the entire capital as a little princess, carefully raised by the Divine Empress and the Holy Maiden as their successor. From the age of five, she departed from this mundane world, and so it truly would be very difficult for her to have ordinary, yet extremely precious, friends.

Xu Yourong faintly smiled, saying, "All my senior and junior sisters in the temple...even all the elders except my teacher treat me with deep respect—how could I possibly have a casual chat with them? But I do have a few acquaintances in the village at the foot of the mountain that I can chat with about what's on my mind...I'll introduce you to them in the future."

Chen Changsheng's curiosity was piqued by these words, thinking, how could an ordinary village have people that you're familiar with?

"If we're really talking about friends...the senior and junior brothers of Mount Li are closer, but they're not in the same place, so chances to meet are comparatively few."

"I hear...that the place where Qiushan Jun practices his sword is not far from Gentle Stream Monastery?"

"What do you want to ask?"

"It's nothing."

"Fine, what you said isn't wrong, I've always regarded Senior Brother as an extremely important friend."

"The problem is that he definitely does not think this way."

"Princess Luoluo worships you as a teacher, but you don't know what she's thinking."

"I can't out-talk you."

"Because your arguments are groundless."

"Fine."

"Why aren't you talking anymore?"

"What do you want to hear?"

"You...are you really Crown Prince Zhaoming?"

The wooden deck below the house instantly grew silent.

The lake water lightly swayed while the white sand remained unmoving, yet the fish swam far away as if sensing that the atmosphere had changed.

Chen Changsheng was silent for a very long time, finally saying, "I don't know, but I don't think I am."

Xu Yourong slightly tilted her head and gently leaned against his shoulder.

## Chapter 582 - When He Resolved To Break Through, Old Friends Arrived

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When she had been heavily wounded in the Garden of Zhou, Xu Yourong had once leaned on Chen Changsheng's shoulder. Later on, she no longer acted so intimately with him, even on those snowy nights in the capital.

She was truly leaning on him now, placing all the weight of her body on his shoulder.

What was passed to him, besides the air and warmth of a young woman, was comfort and kindness.

Chen Changsheng accepted it and was no longer as downcast, saying, "Relax, I'm okay."

Xu Yourong softly replied, "But as Heavenly Secrets thinks this way, the Empress will definitely also be thinking in this direction."

Chen Changsheng said nothing for a few moments, then answered, "I can't prevent other people from thinking what they want."

Xu Yourong knew that nothing could be done about it. She was also powerless to prevent the Empress from thinking whatever she wanted.

Just as Chen Changsheng had said on that night, the Empress had never been a good person in the common sense of the word, and it was also very difficult to examine her in light of ordinary ethics and virtue.

"The rumors all say that when Emperor Taizong relegated the Empress to the Hundred Herb Garden, she became acquainted with my master and His Holiness, only then grasping the method to defy the heavens and change fate... If this is the case, they should have been kindred spirits who would trust each other through thick and thin, why...did the two sides later on become enemies that can't live under the same sky?"

"What happened before that bloody incident of the Orthodox Academy, nobody knows, but I've heard vague rumors that the Empress had made an agreement with Principal Shang. Later on, however, the Empress did not act according to her promise, so the two became enemies."

"That agreement...was probably about the position of emperor."

"That should be the case."

"Why isn't the Empress willing to return the position of the emperor to the Imperial clan?"

"I asked her this question many years ago. The Empress said it was because there was no offspring of the Chen Imperial clan that could shoulder the responsibility of emperor."

"Hundreds of descendants of the Imperial clan are scattered about the counties and provinces. Is there not one that can shoulder the heavy responsibility of the country?"

Chen Changsheng did not completely speak this question.

Xu Yourong understood his meaning. "There isn't."

Chen Changsheng said, "I hear that His Highness the Prince of Xiang, of the same blood as Prince Chen Liu, has a rather excellent reputation."

""That's only exterior reputation." Upon discussing the Prince of Xiang, a hint of scorn appeared on Xu Yourong's brow. "In reality, this prince has been licentious and shameless since he was a child. He was originally born with excellent gifts in cultivation, reaching great achievement of his sun wheel at the age of ten, yet because of his own moral character, he doesn't have a hope of entering the Divine Domain in this life."

"Is entering the Divine Domain very important for succeeding the position of emperor?"

"Yes, it's extremely important."

"Why?"

"If one wants to become sovereign of humankind, what one first needs is not virtue, but strength."

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In order to become sovereign of humankind, great strength was required.

This was not difficult to understand. The demons were in the north, their evil intentions never dying. At any moment, this world could be deluged by a flood that could overflow the heavens, and engulfed in the endless flames of war.

For a similar reason, if one wished to live a better life, to avoid unease and fear, one also needed greater strength.

Any sort of external things could only improve one's mood, reinforce one's confidence, enrich one's days, yet they could not address the fundamental problem.

Friendship and romance were beautiful, and on certain occasions, they could rescue one's life or soul, but one's own strength was still more reliable.

Entering Mount Han, encountering the Demon Lord, and learning many secrets from the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, Chen Changsheng was being confronted by an almost unimaginable pressure that was simultaneously an impetus.

He had to advance in power as quickly as possible. At the very least, he could not be like he was when encountering the Demon Lord on the mountain path, not even able to have a chance of countering. Despite how many magical artifacts and treasures he might have possessed, he could not use their full power, and so could only wait for death.

He decided that during the Boiling Stone Summit, he would seek an opportunity to break into Star Condensation.

Back when he received the Yellow Paper Umbrella from the Tang Old Master in Wenshui, he was only at the upper level of Ethereal Opening, yet he was able to take on the full-force blow of a peak Star Condensation cultivator. If he really could successfully break into Star Condensation, in front of the Demon Lord...and the Divine Empress, the Yellow Paper Umbrella might let him live for a period of time.

This period of time might not be too long—it might only be enough time for a few breaths—but to him, this time was extremely important.

Because besides the Yellow Paper Umbrella, he still had the ten thousand swords in his sheath, the Heavenly Tome Monoliths transformed into stone pearls, and importantly, he still had the Garden of Zhou.

After his breaking into Star Condensation, even powerful figures like the Demon Lord or Divine Empress would presumably find it difficult to directly snap his connection with that space.



Then if he could just fight for a very brief moment of time, he could escape into the Garden of Zhou.

These were external pressures and needs.

His decision to break into Star Condensation had even more to do with his mental needs within.

Only by getting stronger could he be calmer when confronting the fuzzy and indistinct path forward.

Those heavy mental pressures coming from both outside and inside were fierce and direct.

As for the words the Elder of Heavenly Secrets had said to him in the garden, he had long since deliberately forgotten them.

If he ceased cultivation and dispersed all the true essence in his body, he could delay the breaking out of his meridians' injuries for a time? How long was this time? One year? Two years? What was the difference between twenty years old and twenty-two?

More importantly, even if he wanted to struggle on death's door in this manner, would he that had lost all his strength be permitted to live?

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After making this decision, Chen Changsheng used his nearly unimaginable willpower to cast off those frightening pressures and regain his composure.

But Xu Yourong, Tang Thirty-Six, and Zhexiu, those closest to him, still found it impossible to relax, and even grew more concerned.

Because this sort of composure was somewhat without reason, it seemed rather terrifying, just like the sea on the eve of a storm.

The storm had not come, but the attendees of the Boiling Stone Summit began to arrive in succession.

According to reason, these cultivators attending the summit all should have arrived a few days ago, but because of that unforeseen event, the Heavenstone array had sealed off Mount Han for a period of time. As a result, these cultivators were unfortunately, or perhaps extremely fortunately, locked out of Mount Han for a period of time.

With Chen Changsheng's current status, he naturally did not need to welcome anybody. He remained in the house, calming his mind and recuperating, preparing to break into the next realm. Naturally, there were people that would collect and report the news to him.

Zhong Hui had been followed by two teachers sent by Scholartree Manor. What made Chen Changsheng feel somewhat regretful was that as expected, Wang Po did not come. It seemed that these Heavenstones of Mount Han could not provide many valuable insights to an expert of his level.

The people from the Mount Li Sword Sect had arrived. Qiushan Jun, who had not made a public appearance for quite some, failed to appear this time as well. For some reason, Chen Changsheng felt relieved. Presumably, he also did not know how he would react upon seeing Xu Yourong intimately chat with that proud son of heaven.

The people from Mount Li that had come were all old friends, or perhaps acquaintances.

Gou Hanshi, Guan Feibai, and Liang Banhu had all come.

Upon hearing this news, Chen Changsheng was rather happy. "It really is like the Ivy Festival or Grand Examination from two years ago. It's the same people."

Zhexiu replied, "One person is missing."

Chen Changsheng vacantly gazed back and then noticed that Zhexiu's face was rather icy. He then realized that Qi Jian had not appeared...

Tang Thirty-Six patted Zhexiu on the shoulder to comfort him.

Chen Changsheng stood at the edge of the balcony, gazing at the excitement in the distance and hearing the indistinct voice of Guan Feibai. He wanted go over, but he could not. It was still those same words: his current status was no longer the same. As the successor of the Pope, whether it was an elder dispatched by this or that sect or clan, or young geniuses like the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws, it was not convenient for him to take the initiative to visit them.

"It's nothing, Gou Hanshi has always acted dependably. He will definitely immediately come to visit you."

Tang Thirty-Six said, then he glanced at Zhexiu and warned, "I know what you're feeling, and I've also never liked those guys, but in a little while, can you not put on too unwelcome a face? After all, we're representing the Orthodox Academy, so we have to preserve Chen Changsheng's face."

Just as Tang Thirty-Six had anticipated, as soon as Gou Hanshi and the rest of the Mount Li Sword Sect disciples were welcomed to the lakeshore by the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets, without any rest, only a simple wash of the face and rinse of the mouth, they came to visit.

Similarly as Tang Thirty-Six had anticipated, Zhexiu's complexion was truly very ugly.

Guan Feibai's complexion was also very ugly because he was required to follow Gou Hanshi and bow to Chen Changsheng.

Liang Banhu's expression was rather complex, a result of the events of the Garden of Zhou. Although Liang Xiaoxiao had now been proved to have committed suicide, his death still concerned Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng could have sat in a chair and received the bows of the Mount Li Sword Sect disciples.

In the span of a year, many changes had occurred.

But on the mountain path, when Zhong Hui had bowed to him, he had responded according to the etiquette one should show to fellows of the same generation, so why would he change now?

Seeing Chen Changsheng so seriously return their bows, and without the slightest reluctance as well, Liang Banhu's expression grew gentler and Guan Feibai's complexion somewhat improved. However, when he saw that Zhexiu's complexion was still as ugly as ever, his complexion also returned to its former ugliness, and the words he spoke were hard on the ears.

"I'm warning you, don't even think about overstepping your bounds with my junior sister!"

Before this, Tang Thirty-Six had advised Zhexiu to be more cool-headed, but when he heard Guan Feibai's words, he himself forgot the word 'cool-headed'. He sneered at Guan Feibai, "What does 'overstepping bounds' mean? Is your junior sister a princess? Even if she is the Demon Lord's granddaughter, no one in Xuelao City

would recognize her!"

In terms of quarreling, there really weren't many people that were Tang Thirty-Six's match.

The primary reason was that he was the heir of an influential family and had a deep background, yet he possessed none of the demeanor of a noble family's heir, holding an utter disregard for the word 'reputation'.

The second reason was that his words were too sharp, specialized in striking at the weak points of an opponent and thus extremely difficult to defend against.

For example, his short retort just now had clearly been thought up just a moment ago, but it had taken a turn in the middle and then needed only one strike to pierce through the Mount Li Sword Sect's greatest secret and greatest annoyance.

Even someone as good-tempered as Gou Hanshi could not help but wrinkle his brow and glance behind him.

Even a person as accustomed to this sort of conduct as Chen Changsheng could not help but shake his head and aim a glance out of the reception hall.

The Orthodoxy priests and the accompanying Mount Li Sword Sect disciples that had followed Gou Hanshi and his group all hurriedly backed out of the house.

The two sides had just met, and yet there was already an omen that all considerations were about to be cast aside. Who knew just what would happen next in this house?

Perhaps the people involved didn't care, but these priests and disciples did not dare participate, or even hear about it.

# Chapter 583 - The Minor Prelude To The Major Event

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Guan Feibai's personality was cold and ruthless, yet also explosively fierce. There was no way he could suffer Tang Thirty-Six's response, so he coldly yelled back, "This piece of trash that only knows to spend his family's money actually dares to criticize the matters of my Mount Li!"

Tang Thirty-Six teased, "My family just has that much money, and it's none of your goddamn business. In addition, last year, I only needed three days to buy up Clear Lake Restaurant. Do I also have to tell you about it?"

Guan Feibai coldly snorted, then said, "Then as for the matters between my Mount Li Sword Sect and that wolf youth, isn't that also none of your goddamn business? If you really have so much free time on your hands, why don't you hurry up and learn a few more sword techniques, or why else would the sole grandson of the magnificent Tang clan not even be able to enter the Proclamation of Golden Distinction?"

Tang Thirty-Six's complexion flared at these words. It must be known that his failure to enter the Proclamation of Golden Distinction was his greatest regret. Although finding out that Zhexiu and Su Moyu had failed to enter the ranking as well had improved his mood, it had to be said that this fellow before him currently had his name in that ranking.

He clenched his teeth and retorted, "You keep talking and talking, but it's all nonsense! What right do you have to care about



the mutual affection between Zhexiu and Qi Jian? If you really have all that time to spare, and you can't even surpass Zhong Hui, then you might as well practice your cooking! \*\*\*\*, fried peppers and dried meat, and you actually added sugar! Is your brain broken or do you southerners generally practice such outlandish cooking methods?"

"Besides Chen Changsheng, whose cooking actually tasted good?"

Guan Feibai angrily roared, "Let's not even talk about cooking; even when washing dishes, you would break seven out of ten, and you have the gall to say my cooking is bad?"

What they were speaking of was naturally a story from when they were all living in the small house left behind by Xun Mei when viewing monoliths and comprehending the Dao in the Mausoleum of Books.

The relationship between the Orthodox Academy and the Mount Li Sword Sect was truly rather complicated. It was very difficult to describe it in a few words, especially with regards to this generation of youths.

This was the case whether one was discussing that engagement, the relationship between the world-famous Qiushan Jun and Xu Yourong, or the competition between the two sides. From the Ivy Festival to the Grand Examination, these events at the very beginning, the two sides were of course natural rivals, even enemies. But in the Mausoleum of Books, the two sides had lived under the same roof, eaten from the same pot, viewed the monoliths and comprehended the Dao together. With this shared

experience, the hostility gradually faded and they began to grow familiar with each other. And after Chen Changsheng escorted Su Li ten thousand li back south, a rather significant friendship developed between the two parties.

In the end, however, they were still youths, still young cultivating geniuses. The youths of the Orthodox Academy and the Divine Kingdom's Six Laws of the Mount Li Sword Sect were the two groups of youths viewed most optimistically and were often compared by others. The competition between the two seemed bound to persist for a long time; who would truly admit that they were inferior?

The atmosphere in the house was growing more and more tense as the quarrel between Tang Thirty-Six and Guan Feibai got louder and louder, fiercer and fiercer. Although, even until the end, both sides maintained some reason—especially Tang Thirty-Six, who did not treat Guan Feibai like he did the challengers from the other Ivy Academies, directly sending regards to the other party's eighteen generations of ancestors—this argument still ended up stoking some true flames.

Guan Feibai's face was very pale. It wasn't because he had applied powder to his face, nor due to an injury, but because he had been angered. "Senior Brother, I can't hold back anymore, I want to challenge him in the Boiling Stone Summit!"

Upon hearing this, Liang Banhu's expression flickered. It must be known that before coming, Gou Hanshi had informed them that although the Mount Li Sword Sect and Orthodox Academy could not be considered sworn friends, they weren't enemies either. In

the Boiling Stone Summit, unless it was absolutely necessary, it was best that they not fight each other.

Tang Thirty-Six was also furious, calling out, "Chen Changsheng, you can endure it, but I can't! In the Boiling Stone Summit, you had definitely better beat this guy into mincemeat!"

As he spoke, everyone very naturally turned to Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng.

Yet where were the figures of Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng in this room?

"Where are they?" Tang Thirty-Six asked in surprise.

"They left," Zhexiu answered. He then turned to Guan Feibai and declared with an indifferent expression, "In the summit, I will challenge you."

So saying, he turned and left the house.

Guan Feibai stood in a daze for a few moments before finally reacting. As he gazed at Zhexiu's back, he sneered, "You think I'm afraid of you?"

On the side, Tang Thirty-Six shot back, "If you're not afraid of him, why did you just stand there doing nothing?"

Fuming, Guan Feibai replied, "If you've got the skill, why don't you step up! One moment you're calling on Chen Changsheng, the next you're letting him do it. Do you know the meaning of shame?"

Tang Thirty-Six's expression remained unchanging as he replied, "I don't even care for face, so how can I even know how the word 'shame' is written? Not convinced? Then bite me."

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Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi had long since departed the room. Coming to a high balcony, they stood by the railing and gazed at the lake.

Chen Changsheng was keenly aware that the quarrel in the house could not be ended in such a short time, and there was no meaning to it. The only purpose in staying around to listen was to defile one's ears.

"Just why is this the case?" Chen Changsheng turned to Gou Hanshi and very seriously asked, "Hybrids of human and demi-human blood truly are heavily discriminated against, but I also know very well that the Mount Li Sword Sect...at least Senior Su Li is not that sort of person. Why does he insist on blocking this marriage?"

Gou Hanshi knew that Chen Changsheng was a very

straightforward person. Without enough reasons, it was simply impossible to convince him, so he straightforwardly replied, "Zhexiu doesn't have much longer to live."

Chen Changsheng had thought of many reasons, and with Xu Yourong's help, he had also heard about similar arguments, but he had not expected...that it really would be this way.

"Zhexiu's body truly does conceal some hidden dangers, but they absolutely can be treated."

He had been treating Zhexiu for a very long time, and was still treating him now. He knew that an odd illness like the Tide Rush of Blood was truly difficult to treat. However, with the abundant experience he had gained from reconstructing Luoluo's and Xuanyuan Po's meridians, he believed that sooner or later, he would be able to find a perfect treatment solution.

Gou Hanshi glanced at him in surprise, saying, "You know?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "I've already begun treating him."

Gou Hanshi contemplated this, then shook his head. "Martial Granduncle has determined that he will die young. It's impossible for you to cure him."

Chen Changsheng rebutted, "In other aspects, I'm inferior to Senior Su Li, but he's no match for me in this aspect."

Gou Hanshi thought of that teacher of his who had traveled far and wide and realized that this really was the case.

At present, Daoist Ji's name was not too widely known in the world, but several centuries ago, he had been the world's most renowned doctor.

Let alone the fact that his true identity was Principal Shang of the Orthodox Academy.

"You can convince me, but on this matter, you first have to convince Martial Granduncle. Or else I will not agree to Zhexiu coming to Mount Li to see her," Gou Hanshi warned."

Chen Changsheng replied, "What need is there for this? They're just seeing each other. I'll guarantee that nothing else will occur."

Gou Hanshi gazed at him and calmly said, "That is Mount Li, the sect of myriad swords. Don't think about those stories of elopement written in books."

The youths of the Orthodox Academy truly had thought in this direction and had even secretly made preparations. Upon being so easily exposed with a single sentence, Chen Changsheng couldn't help but feel somewhat embarrassed.

"If you're sure that you can cure Zhexiu's illness, why can't you wait until you cure him and then talk about this matter?"

Gou Hanshi had voiced the most crucial question.

Chen Changsheng replied, "Lovesickness is also an illness. Zhexiu is still doing okay, but what of Qi Jian?"

Gou Hanshi recalled his junior sister's furious yells on that night and didn't know how to respond. After a long while, he finally said, "I will relay your words to her."

Chen Changsheng felt somewhat relieved, thinking, as long as she can hold onto some hope, Qi Jian will probably have an easier time living in Mount Li.

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# Chapter 584 - There Is Also A Black Stone Here

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When one couldn't agree, besides just ceasing to talk, one could also change the subject. Chen Changsheng was not good at chatting, but that didn't mean that Gou Hanshi wasn't. Moreover, he really did have some matters that he desired precise answers for from Chen Changsheng. "Was it really that person that entered Mount Han?"

Chen Changsheng nodded.

Gou Hanshi needed a few moments of silence to process the shock in his heart. He sighed, "The Demon Lord personally appeared and you were able to survive. You'll be blessed with good fortune in the future."

Chen Changsheng shook his head. He was keenly aware that the Demon Lord had entered Mount Han to eat him. If he had just wanted to kill him...there would have been no way he could have survived.

The occasional sounds of fierce quarreling, like the clashing of swords, could occasionally be heard from the house by the lake.

On the top floor balcony, Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi stood side by side, their clothes gently swaying in the wind.

On a distant stone, Zhong Hui quietly gazed in their direction,



silently thinking about something.

On the lake shore, many cultivators from various sects were gazing distantly at Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi, and there were also some people looking at Zhong Hui.

Upon seeing this scene, seeing these youths, both the experts of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and the elders of the various sects were all deeply moved.

In the past two years, many outstanding young cultivating geniuses had appeared on the continent.

Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi, the two childish fellows arguing in the house, and even Zhong Hui standing on the stone, not to mention Xu Yourong and Qiushan Jun.

In just these few short years, so many brilliant and genius youths had appeared. This was an extremely rare occurrence. Besides Wang Po's generation...not even Wang Po's generation when they were young were as amazing as these youths. In order to make a comparison, perhaps one would really have to go back to that magnificent and surging generation of greats from one thousand years ago.

It truly was the generation of blooming wildflowers.

"I really don't know, after many years, which of these youths will be the most outstanding."

"No matter which one of them is most outstanding, in my view, they would all have to thank Chen Changsheng."

"Why?"

"Because that night of starlight in the Mausoleum of Books helped these youths break through the most difficult pass."

The discussion stopped and the scene grew quiet once more.

The elders of the various sects and the experts of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets recalled those life-or-death scenes when they and their peers attempted to break into Ethereal Opening. When they turned once more to those young geniuses, their gazes were complex, carrying admiration, even jealousy. And all of this was because of Chen Changsheng.

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The forcibly postponed Boiling Stone Summit, on a certain unremarkable and ordinary day at the end of summer, formally opened, held amongst those elegant and ornate pavilions on the lake shore. Because of the Demon Lord's appearance in Mount Han, the atmosphere was rather oppressive. Moreover, compared to the past, far fewer big names appeared, so it couldn't but feel less interesting.

Not a single one of the top ten experts of the Proclamation of Liberation had attended. Perhaps they were like Painted Armor Xiao Zhang and regarded the Boiling Stone Summit as an empty affair, or perhaps they were like Liang Wangsun and could not come for various reasons. The most miserable was still the demi-human expert Xiao De. He had been wounded too seriously by the Demon Lord and had been sent back to White Emperor City a few days ago.

Fortunately, the Orthodoxy had sent an extremely impressive group this time. Besides the future Pope Chen Changsheng, there were also the two Prefects, Linghai Zhiwang and Mao Qiuyu. The Holy Maiden of the south, Xu Yourong, had also personally appeared. This was enough to give the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets face, and it also buoyed the spirits of those cultivators that had traveled long and far to attend the Boiling Stone Summit.

As the host, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets sat in the very center. Given her most exalted status, Xu Yourong sat to his right-hand side, concealed behind layer after layer of white curtains, and Chen Changsheng sat across from her on the other side. To the various cultivators, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets naturally possessed an honored status and was also very mysterious. Today, they could see with their own eyes his true appearance, a naturally precious opportunity, yet the vast majority of the gazes were still focused on Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong.

Those gazes were brimming with reverence, yearning, and of course, curiosity.

Especially those cultivators that were not from the capital.

The present world was exceptionally clear on everything concerning Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng.

This summer, he and she were not yet seventeen. They were the youngest upper level Ethereal Opening cultivators in history.

Most importantly, she was the Holy Maiden of the south while he was the next Pope.

At their age, they already possessed such a level of cultivation and such status. This was a sight scarcely seen in recorded history.

There was once an engagement between them. If not for a few surprises occurring, they would have become husband and wife.

If this point was added, this story seemed even more like a legend.

When the gazes of the crowd fell upon Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong, the voice of the steward from the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets seemed to fade into the distance, replaced with countless whispers.

This young man and woman were far too famous.

Their story was also far too famous.

The young Daoist entered the capital and was ignored by the Divine General's estate. The marriage contract appeared in the Ivy Festival, and then with the changes of the world, the youth became the successor to the Pope. The Divine General's estate desired the continuation of the predestined relationship, yet they only suffered a slap to the face and a forceful annulment. Yet after that battle amidst the wind and snow on the Bridge of Helplessness, the young man and young woman met for the first time, and the situation seemed to change once more...Chen Changsheng seemed to change his mind, wanting to marry this beautiful woman, yet he was met with Xu Yourong's cold refusal. Thus came that scene known by many people, the youth standing in the snow before that palace in the late night.

So many twists and turns, one climax after another—if these were not things that had really happened, everyone would think it a play. Moreover, this would be one of the most conventional and cliché plays, but so cliché that it was brilliant and well-received by the masses. Today, many people finally saw the starring male and female of this play. How could they not be curious or excited?

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Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong did nothing, only sat, but this was enough to capture ninety percent of the crowd's attention and the entire sight of the summit. But still, in the end, this was the Boiling Stone Summit, and no matter how long the crowd wished to stare at them, they were forced to momentarily pull their gazes

away to fall upon that black table at the very end of the straight path.

On the table was an extremely ancient plate, painted in red. On the plate was a black stone about the size of a fruit pit.

Black table, red plate, black stone.

The alternating black and red made them exceptionally distinct and abnormally dazzling.

Chen Changsheng's gaze fell upon the black stone and found it hard to pull away. His expression did not change, but his mind began to churn.

This was not one of those stones that he had seen in the sky a few days ago, nor was it one of those stones that could be spotted in the lake, amongst the cliffs and scattered about everywhere.

Mount Han was covered all over in Heavenstones; this was a matter he and Xu Yourong had confirmed. Yet this stone was clearly somewhat different.

This stone was much smaller than the Heavenstones. Its treatment was also very different, having been placed carefully on the red plate.

Crucially, he could faintly sense a familiar ripple of Qi from the small black stone.

He gazed at the nearby canopy of curtains.

Xu Yourong was sitting behind those curtains.

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# Chapter 585 - The Mountain Gate Of Mount Li (i)

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The curtains could cut off the prying gazes of bystanders, yet they could not cut off the mental connection that had long since been formed between them.

Xu Yourong saw Chen Changsheng shift his gaze in her direction and knew what he was thinking. After pondering it for a few moments, she lightly shook her head.

Chen Changsheng felt the black stone somewhat familiar, not merely because the black stone on the red plate was very similar to his black stone. It was more because the Qi emitted by the small black stone was very similar to that emitted by the black stone he had found in the Lingyan Pavilion. In other words, the small black stone taken out by the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets might have something to do with Wang Zhice.

The small black stone left behind by Wang Zhice that he had obtained from the Lingyan Pavilion was a Heavenly Tome Monolith, so could this small black stone be another Heavenly Tome Monolith? After visiting the Mausoleum of Books and the Mausoleum of Zhou, and having that conversation with Divine General Han Qing, no one was clearer than him and Xu Yourong on the whereabouts of the lost Heavenly Tome Monoliths, so it was hard not to have some misgivings.

Only ordinary Heavenstones had been taken out in past Boiling Stone Summits, so those elders and important figures that had once attended were also rather astonished. However, those



cultivators attending the Boiling Stone Summit for the first time were not clear on the distinction. Yet when they noticed Chen Changsheng turn his gaze to those curtains, they couldn't help but be excited as they thought, Little Principal Chen really does have deep feelings for his once-fiancée.

The majority of cultivators from the south were sitting in the same place as those from Holy Maiden Peak. Upon seeing the gaze Chen Changsheng sent over, many of their faces revealed ridicule or empathy. There were even some disciples of Holy Maiden Peak who, when thinking of that dispute caused by ending the engagement, could not help but speak a few mocking words, teasing that a certain person's pestering was really quite dull. Some also harshly criticized that a certain person should look in a mirror and realize that some things couldn't be denied just because one didn't want them, couldn't be obtained just because one wanted them. Some people even very solemnly requested a certain person to act with dignity.

Not a single cultivator from the south mentioned Chen Changsheng's name, but everyone knew that all these words were aimed at him.

This world-famous engagement had experienced far too many twists and turns, attracted far too many disputes. Only last winter when the Pope forcefully annulled the engagement could this phase finally be said to have come to a close.

In this story, Chen Changsheng was naturally the party at the very beginning to suffer all the humiliation and harm, but in the end, it was Xu Yourong that carried all the shame and dishonor.

In everyone's view, it was only right that the person in the world that currently most loathed Chen Changsheng was Xu Yourong.

She was the Holy Maiden of the south, the Heavenly Phoenix immortal worshipped by countless others. If she did not like Chen Changsheng, there would naturally be many other people that did not like Chen Changsheng, especially those cultivators from the south. It was only natural that they not show any sort of good expression towards Chen Changsheng. Even if he was the future Pope, they still wanted to vent the Holy Maiden's anger for her.

The pavilions were all in a cool breeze, tranquil and serenely beautiful. Those jeers aimed at Chen Changsheng were like catkins in the wind, drifting to and fro about the plaza and falling in everyone's ears.

The priests of the Orthodoxy all had rather unsightly complexions, Mao Qiuyu was calm and silent, and Linghai Zhiwang raised his brows, seemingly very interested.

Chen Changsheng withdrew his gaze from the location assigned to Holy Maiden Peak and somewhat uneasily rubbed his knee.

Zhexiu did not care about these opinions while Tang Thirty-Six knew the inside story, so his laugh was all the more splendid.

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A splendid sword glow would occasionally rise up from the stone platform between the towers. It was like those commonly seen summer lightning bolts, but also very much like those soul-shaking brushstrokes upon a mural.

Besides Star Seizer Academy, which represented the military might of the Great Zhou Army, the vast majority of cultivators in the world were most accustomed to using swords. In today's Boiling Stone Summit, the sword glows seemed to never cease.

Cultivators qualified to attend the Boiling Stone Summit all possessed incredible talent, or at least had outstanding potential. They all possessed strong cultivation, at least one entire level stronger than what they were during the Grand Examination and the Garden of Zhou. Those brave enough to walk on the stone platform and challenge others or those worthy of being challenged by others were at least at the middle level of Ethereal Opening.

The several matches that had already concluded had all been exceptionally marvelous. All the fighters had used their unique skills and their full strength. Moreover, with the important figures of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and the Orthodoxy keeping watch, there was no possibility of serious injuries being inflicted by accident. Inevitably, however, it was hard for the stone platform to avoid a few bloodstains.

Although Chen Changsheng was very interested in that black stone, he had no intention of stepping onto the stage, and naturally, no one came to challenge him.

With his current status, unless he was willing, no person could force him to accept a challenge, just like in the summer of last year.

Xu Yourong's current status was even higher than his and she was thus even less likely to take part in this affair.

They just quietly sat at the side of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, watching the matches on the stone platform.

What was strange was that with the passage of time, still no one challenged the other two members of the Orthodox Academy.

Zhexiu only watched for a while before closing his eyes to rest. He seemed to show little interest for those marvelous matches.

Tang Thirty-Six, on the other hand, was rather bored. He was constantly calling on the maids of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets to switch out the tea in his cup and commenting on the snacks on his plate.

Only when a certain person walked onto the stone platform did Zhexiu open his eyes, did Tang Thirty-Six put down his tea cup and take out a towel to wipe his lips, his expression growing more serious.

The person stepping onto the stage was Liang Banhu.

His opponent was an expert from Hanqiu City's Emotion-Severing Sect.

This Emotion-Severing Sect expert had previously using his exceptionally marvelous Myriad Willows Sword to easily defeat a female disciple from Gentle Stream Monastery. His age was around thirty years old, his cultivation already at the upper level of Ethereal Opening. In the past, he would definitely have been praised as a genius, but in the past few years, too many cultivators had suddenly emerged that were younger than him, more talented than him, and had higher cultivation levels than him...

Liang Banhu was a disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect, the fifth of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws, and he was naturally the representative of these youths.

Perhaps it was because he had just defeated a cultivation expert from the south and his confidence was at its peak. Perhaps it was because, over the past two years, the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws had snatched away too much glory and he had already accumulated too much discontent. Of course, it was also possible he held a grudge over the one letter of Su Li's that had destroyed the Myriad Willows Garden. Whatever the reason, this expert of the Emotion-Severing Sect without hesitation issued a challenge to the Mount Li Sword Sect.

He had challenged Liang Banhu. This seemed like a very casual choice, but many people could tell that this was a choice arrived at after careful deliberation, and was even somewhat insidious.

Liang Banhu was Liang Xiaoxiao's brother by blood—and now the

entire continent knew that Liang Xiaoxiao had colluded with the demons, attempting in vain to harm his fellow disciple and Chen Changsheng in the Garden of Zhou. After meeting with failure, he chose to brutally commit suicide in a bid to frame Chen Changsheng.

This expert of the Emotion-Severing Sect had chosen Liang Banhu as his opponent naturally because he wanted to make an issue of this matter. Just as expected, the moment Liang Banhu stepped onto the stage, this person's cold voice uttered, "Although you are Liang Xiaoxiao's brother, I will not place his sins upon your head, but I will also not permit you the chance to obtain this piece of heaven."

At this statement, the entire place grew extremely quiet.

Everyone knew that this Emotion-Severing Sect expert was just looking for a reason. In reality, he just wanted to shake Liang Banhu's fighting intent.

Yet neither the Mount Li Sword Sect nor its partner Holy Maiden Peak could reply to this statement.

Liang Xiaoxiao and Liang Banhu were both descendants of the Liang Household. The role played by the Liang Household in this portion of history was excessively complex. If Liang Banhu was like Liang Xiaoxiao, finding it impossible to forget his princely origins, finding it impossible to strictly adhere to his identity as a disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect, then his obtaining a Heavenstone was something many powers were not willing to see.

Guan Feibai's face seemed to be covered in a sheet of frost. The gaze he aimed at the Emotion-Severing Sect expert was brimming with murderous intent, but in the end, he did not move.

Gou Hanshi's expression did not change as he quietly gazed at Liang Banhu's figure. He was very confident in his junior brother.

In this silence, before the battle began, a voice spoke.

The person speaking was Tang Thirty-Six.

He looked at the expert from the Emotion-Severing Sect and said, "If you want to fight, just fight. What need is there to speak so much nonsense?"

With the transformation these words wrought on the atmosphere, the expression of the Emotion-Severing Sect expert also subtly changed.

No one could have imagined that it was not over. Soon after, everyone could hear Tang Thirty-Six's next sentence.

"...just like the old ancestor of your sect, in the end, you might be beaten into idiocy."

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The Sect Master of the Emotion-Severing Sect, the lord of Hanqiu City, and the soul of the Tianliang Zhu clan were all one person, the old ancestor of many people, the Emotion-Severing Sect expert included.

This old ancestor was one of the Storms of the Eight Directions, the Solitary Drunk under the Moon, Zhu Luo.

This statement of Tang Thirty-Six's was very impudent, very offensive, very tough, but when carefully considered, not wrong either.

Whether it was in the night rain of Xunyang City or the spring wind of the Myriad Willows Garden, Zhu Luo had suffered crushing defeats. Su Li's one letter had cut him into an idiot.

This statement of his had greatly swelled the momentum of the Mount Li Sword Sect.

Guan Feibai gazed in the direction of the Orthodox Academy, thinking, why did this guy have such a change in temperament today? If I can challenge him in a little while, then...I'll have him vomit up less blood.

The Emotion-Severing Sect expert's expression shifted back and forth as he coldly said to Tang Thirty-Six, "In a little while, I will definitely challenge you."



Tang Thirty-Six shook his head, saying, "You won't have the chance."

A clamor rose up as everyone thought, why is he so confident in Liang Banhu? Yet no one noticed him scooting closer to Chen Changsheng and using a voice that only the two of them could hear to whisper, "Based on your insight, which one is stronger, Liang Banhu or this idiot?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Why is it that you seem extremely worried right now?"

Tang Thirty-Six answered, "I feel...I was venting your anger for you, and cursed Zhu Luo in this way. In a little while, that guy will definitely go all-out against me, so it's best if I don't run into him."

Chen Changsheng gazed at Liang Banhu and said, "There's no need to worry, you spoke correctly—that person won't have the chance."

Both he and Gou Hanshi were well-versed in the Daoist Canon, an extremely rare feat. Amongst their peers, they naturally possessed extremely good insight as well.

Gou Hanshi had never been concerned about Liang Banhu.

Chen Changsheng also thought the same.

Liang Banhu was different from Liang Xiaoxiao.

Liang Xiaoxiao was a pine tree that had grown up in a gloomy ravine.

Liang Banhu was a stalk of grass growing on a sunny slope.

Liang Banhu's personality was very wooden. He didn't speak, and even the expression on his face changed very little.

Amongst the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws, he had always been the least renowned.

But that did not mean that he was the weakest.

Let alone the fact there was not a single weakling among the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws.

Liang Banhu unsheathed his sword and gazed at the expert of the Emotion-Severing Sect, saying a single word, "Please."

The Emotion-Severing Sect expert arched his brows, preparing to say something.

However, Liang Banhu did not give him another chance to speak.

A plume of dust suddenly appeared on the clean stone platform.

Like a dragon of dust, it charged forward with incredible speed.

A plain and unsophisticated Qi that seemed like yellow earth could be sensed by the crowd with the emergence of this dragon of dust.

Even the nearby lake seemed to feel some sort of pressure, faint ripples forming on its surface.

Nobody blinked—nobody had time to blink. With the charging dust, the curling of a yellow dragon, Liang Banhu arrived before that Emotion-Severing Sect expert.

The expert's pupils suddenly constricted as he felt an intense sense of danger.

He had not imagined that Liang Banhu's sword style was actually at complete odds with his personality, was actually so fierce and unyielding.

How could he break through such a fierce sword intent? Only with an even fiercer sword intent.

With a furious roar, the Emotion-Severing Sect expert sent his sword whistling through the air, carrying no intention of yielding as it stabbed straight at Liang Banhu!

Liang Banhu's expression did not change. He was like a peasant plowing the slopes, holding his sword like it was a hoe, smashing it

down in an honest and open fashion.

This attack seemed to be a very ordinary sword technique. In reality, it really was a very ordinary sword technique.

This attack was not fast, not even one-fifth of the speed of the Heavenly Dao Academy's Sword of Hithering Light.

This attack was not cruel, not even having the slightest aura of the Orthodox Academy's Toppling Mountain Staff.

This attack was not beautiful, not in the slightest bit worthy of comparing with the legendary "Departing Spring" of South Stream Temple.

Compared to the countless wondrous sword styles of the Mount Li Sword Sect, there was nothing worth mentioning about Liang Banhu's attack.

But this attack was very stable. Both the hand gripping the sword and the sword technique itself were very stable, like an unmoving mountain cliff, a path amongst the mountains.

The reason this attack was so stable was that this sword style was a foundation, the foundation of all of the Mount Li Sword Sect's countless sword styles.

"Mountain Gate Sword."

Zhexiu gazed at the not-at-all-dazzling sword glow on the platform. A light flashed through his eyes, and then they began to blaze.

# Chapter 586 - The Mountain Gate Of Mount Li (II)

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Yes, the sword style Liang Banhu used was the most ordinary Mountain Gate Sword of the Mount Li Sword Sect.

Any disciple that entered the Mount Li Sword Sect would learn this sword style in their first year.

Chen Changsheng had learned this sword style before, so he naturally recognized it, but only today, after seeing this one attack of Liang Banhu's, did he understand that Mount Li truly was worthy of being called the sect of myriad swords. Even their introductory ordinary sword style had its own essence and soul and could not be lightly overlooked. He saw in Liang Banhu's one attack a little of the Stupid Sword's concept.

Liang Banhu's sword met with the Emotion-Severing Sect expert's sword.

A muffled boom.

The clashing of fierce sword intents. Which was stronger?

It was naturally the more stable sword intent that was stronger.

The hillside facing the sun was covered all over in ramrod-straight rows of crops, none of them slanted in the least bit.

Liang Banhu's sword and the expert's sword clashed and then parted, but the next attack followed soon after.

The hand holding the sword was far too stable, his sword far too stable, so much so that there was no delay between the sword techniques.

Ten-odd clashes of swords resounded through the peak of Mount Han. In only a moment, Liang Banhu and this expert from the Emotion-Severing Sect had already exchanged several techniques. Liang Banhu's sword was as stable as it was in the beginning and incessantly pressing forward.

It was just like walking along a row of crops, but it was even more similar to climbing amongst the precipitous crags of Mount Li. The speed was slow, but the feet were extremely stable. Thus, there would eventually come a day when one could walk to the highest point.

The stone platform was pervaded with dust, sword glows flashing intermittently within. With a sudden clear cry, Liang Banhu drew back his sword and returned, lightly retreating several zhang before his feet rested on the ground.

The hand holding his sword was still stable, his expression still calm. He was just like a peasant that had completed his farming for the day.

The expert from the Emotion-Severing Sect somewhat

incredulously gazed at his abdomen. At some point, a wound had appeared there.

The wound was not deep, with not much blood flowing from it, but it was very straight, looking just as if it had been drawn on.

This battle had already been decided.

Many people thought that Liang Banhu might obtain victory. Although he was the least renowned of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws, in the end, he was still a part of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws.

But no one had expected him to easily...or to be more precise, to so stably obtain victory.

Only a person with complete control over the situation could deny their opponent any chance, could give off a sense of stability akin to walking along a row of crops or steadily climbing a mountain, a feeling that this was inevitable and right.

Even more shocking was that from beginning to end, he had only used the most ordinary sword style of Mount Li: the Mountain Gate Sword.

"Concede."

Liang Banhu sheathed his sword, clasped his hands and bowed towards the Emotion-Severing Sect expert, then returned to the



Mount Li Sword Sect group, his expression still unchanging.

But Zhexiu's gaze was the most sensitive. He noticed that when sheathing the sword, Liang Banhu's sleeve had been trembling somewhat.

When confronting his opponent, the hand wielding the sword had been so stable. Now, after emerging victorious, why was his hand trembling?

It was naturally not tension or unease, but a concealed excitement, or happiness after some oppressive pressure in the chest was finally relieved.

The injured Emotion-Severing Sect expert was helped off the stage and received the treatment of the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets. A wandering cultivator from the northwest, his face pale and his appearance dour, slightly creased his brow as he gazed in the direction of the people from the Mount Li Sword Sect. Tianliang County was in the northwest, and besides the Snow Mountain Sect, the sects and wandering cultivators of the tens of thousands of li in the northwest were linked in countless ways with the Emotion-Severing Sect and the Zhu clan.

To put it another way, they all revered Zhu Luo as a god.

It was very obvious that this wandering cultivator would issue a challenge to the Mount Li Sword Sect.

The Mount Li Sword Sect did not give him the chance.

Guan Feibai walked onto the stone platform and said expressionlessly to the wandering cultivator, "Come then."

Since I know that you plan to challenge, I might as well make it more straightforward and challenge you instead.

The Mount Li Sword Sect was not an inflexible sect that only had one style, but Guan Feibai's style was truly the most prominent in the Mount Li Sword Sect.

This sort of style was straightforward, fierce, unyielding, arrogant. It originated from Su Li and had persisted for several centuries now.

Upon hearing Guan Feibai's cold voice, the area around the stone platform grew even quieter.

The wandering cultivator from the northwest had a rather ugly complexion, but in the end, he could no longer remain where he was and slowly walked onto the stage.

Guan Feibai raised his left hand to hold his longsword horizontally in front of his eyes. His expression indifferent, he did not speak.

The wandering cultivator slowly pulled out his sword, his expression grave, his sleeves drifting about as he emitted his Qi

outwards and gradually began to build up energy.

A clear whistle!

Guan Feibai rushed forward, his sword pulled from its sheath and slashing through the lake wind, heading towards the wandering cultivator.

The dust which was still slowly settling to the floor billowed into the air once more and the surface of the lake was jolted even more seriously.

Snicksnicksnicksnick! Four extremely clear sounds of the edge of a sword cutting through a body could be heard, and four sword glows directly slashed apart the lake wind and waters!

With a groan, the wandering cultivator continuously retreated, utterly incapable of blocking Guan Feibai's sword as wound after wound appeared on his abdomen.

"Enough," Gou Hanshi declared.

His voice was very soft, but everyone around the platform could hear it loud and clear.

Guan Feibai's sword energy was just at its peak, but upon hearing his senior brother's words, he forcefully halted his steps.

With a crack, a gray stone under his foot suddenly gained a few fine lines.

The wandering cultivator simply did not believe that he would stop when told to stop, and moreover...that he really could stop when told to.

His already prepared defensive technique could not be released, so his true essence began to flow backwards, making it impossible for him to stop his feet.

He fell back like an intoxicated man, his steps growing more and more disorderly. Ultimately, he was unable to stand firm and fell on his butt, a quite embarrassing appearance.

At this time, Guan Feibai had already sheathed his sword and turned around, heading back to the Mount Li Sword Sect's spot.

The wandering cultivator from the northwest gazed at Guan Feibai's back, his face pale to the extreme and brimming with shame and suffering. His agitated mind and the flaring up of his internal injuries were finally impossible to endure, and he vomited a mouthful of blood.

The stone platform by the lake was still silent, even more silent than previously, a deathly stillness.

Tang Thirty-Six said nothing. In a rare occurrence, he did not throw a few jeers at Guan Feibai.

The crowd, stunned by Guan Feibai's cultivation on the path of the sword and his killing power, were similarly speechless. However, no one had noticed a certain detail of that battle that had passed in the blink of an eye.

Zhexiu noticed, his expression a little chilly as he said, "He also used the Mountain Gate Sword."

It was just then that a rebuke brimming with rage came from the stone platform. "The bullying of your Mount Li Sword Sect is truly too unbearable!"

Everyone could already see clearly that the present situation was a battle between the Mount Li Sword Sect and Tianliang County.

The relationship between the cultivators of the Mount Li Sword Sect and Tianliang County was very complex because Su Li had once killed off half the Liang Household, because of the identities of Liang Xiaoxiao and Liang Banhu and the events concerning them, because of that night rain in Xunyang City last year, and because of that letter this year that had rendered the Myriad Willows Garden into scorched earth.

A deep hatred existed between the two sides with no solution in sight.

At this time, the person that had come to take revenge for injustice on behalf of the cultivators of Tianliang County was naturally also a person of Tianliang County.

Scholar Hu, an expert of Hanqiu City.

This person's talent in cultivation had been jointly acknowledged by the Great Zhou Imperial Court and the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets many years ago.

Everyone was very sure that if this person could successfully break into Star Condensation, he would assuredly be able to enter the Proclamation of Liberation.

In the north, he was even lauded as being undefeated against anyone in the Ethereal Opening Realm and under.

Since Liang Banhu and Guan Feibai had already come out, the person he challenged was naturally Gou Hanshi.

The mood instantly grew rather tense.

Gou Hanshi had been well-versed in the Daoist Canon since he was a child. Whether in terms of intelligence, willpower, or comprehension, he was one of the best.

If Mount Li did not have Qiushan Jun and the world outside of Mount Li did not have Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng, he would assuredly be the ideal choice amongst this generation of youths to lead the human world.

Although Scholar Hu's reputation was not as resounding, he had cultivated for many more years, so whether in terms of cultivation or experience, he was at least one level above.

For these two experts to soon exchange pointers in the Boiling Stone Summit, one could imagine how intense, how marvelous the battle to come would be.

Gou Hanshi walked onto the stone platform and nodded his head at Scholar Hu, but he remained silent.

Scholar Hu had said that the Mount Li Sword Sect's bullying was too unbearable.

He did not reply, did not argue, because although he was skilled in these things, he did not wish to.

But in the eyes of everyone else, was this composure and silence not a sort of humiliation out of disregard?

Scholar Hu expressionlessly said, "Could it be that you have nothing to say?"

Gou Hanshi shook his head.

He had nothing he wanted to say.

Starting from that storm in Xunyang City, when that expert of

the Emotion-Severing Sect mentioned Liang Xiaoxiao's name, it was foreordained that this battle would occur.

Mount Li's mountain gate was an actual gate.

Upon opening this gate, one would be able to see Mount Li.

The temperaments of the Mount Li Sword Sect's disciples were all different, but they all enjoyed [opening the gate to see the mountain](#).

(TN: 'Opening the gate/door to see the mountain' is a Chinese idiom that means 'very straightforward'.)

Gou Hanshi was a gentle person, but he was no exception.

He unsheathed his sword and thrust it forward.

It was only one attack.

Scholar Hu had been defeated.

A crushing defeat.

This technique was called: Open the Gate, See the Mountain.

The first move of the Mount Li Sword Sect's Mountain Gate Sword.



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The lake shore was utterly silent.

The gazes of the crowd incessantly moved between the unconscious and injured Scholar Hu and Gou Hanshi, who had already sheathed his sword and was walking back. They were stunned speechless and gradually began to feel perplexed.

Chen Changsheng was also rather perplexed, but not because Gou Hanshi was able to so easily defeat his opponent.

He had always admired, even esteemed Gou Hanshi. He had always believed that he was able to defeat Gou Hanshi in their match during the Grand Examination not because he was stronger than Gou Hanshi, but because he had more reasons than Gou Hanshi to obtain first rank of the first banner, because he had nothing in this world that he was worried about.

This Scholar Hu was lauded as being undefeated by anyone at Ethereal Opening, but so what?

At the moment, Chen Changsheng could defeat initial level Star Condensation experts, so Gou Hanshi definitely could as well.

He was somewhat confused, and the primary reason for his uneasiness was that Liang Banhu, Guan Feibai, and Gou Hanshi had all used the Mountain Gate Sword of the Mount Li Sword Sect.

He could understand this as the self-confidence of the disciples of Mount Li, the pride of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws.

But he still felt that there was some other significance hidden behind this choice.

"Because of Liang Xiaoxiao."

Tang Thirty-Six looked at the location occupied by the Mount Li Sword Sect, his expression somewhat solemn, unlike his usual frivolousness.

Chen Changsheng was confused, asking, "Liang Xiaoxiao?"

Tang Thirty-Six drew back his gaze to look at him and said, "Many people forgot just who was the first rank of the first banner of the Grand Examination before yours."

Chen Changsheng recalled, and answered, "It was Liang Xiaoxiao."

"Correct, even amongst those seven guys, Liang Xiaoxiao's innate strength was outstanding. Some people only know of Guan Feibai's astonishing willpower when cultivating and studying swordplay, about how he practiced all the sword styles of the Mount Li Sword

Sect until he became proficient in all of them, yet nobody knows that Liang Xiaoxiao was not at all weak. He even refined the introductory sword style of the Mount Li Sword Sect into a true killing art."

Tang Thirty-Six continued, "In the minds of the Mount Li Sword Sect's disciples, this introductory sword style...is Liang Xiaoxiao's sword. The meaning they want to express by using his sword style to fight is crystal clear."

Zhexiu turned to the place where the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect were seated, a tinge of blood red gradually appearing in the depths of his pupils.

Chen Changsheng pondered this, then said, "I don't think so."

# Chapter 587 - Today, The Starlight Is Glorious

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Liang Xiaoxiao, disciple of the Mount Li Sword Sect, former member of the Divine Kingdom's Seven Laws.

Out of hatred, this young genius who originally had a limitless future of light before him ultimately stepped on the path of betraying humanity and collaborated with the demons. In the Garden of Zhou, he had stirred up a storm of blood and attempted to assassinate Chen Changsheng, Qi Jian and the others. After his failure, he refused to give up, using his own death as a sacrifice for the most unyielding of plans.

But with the return of Su Li to Mount Li, the conclusion of Mount Li's internal strife, Chen Changsheng's return to the capital, and Zhuang Huanyu's suicide to escape punishment, all controversies and doubts came to a sudden end. Now, Liang Xiaoxiao had become Mount Li's greatest dishonor, or perhaps its easiest point of attack—the expert from the Emotion-Severing Sect from a while ago had done just this.

The Mount Li Sword Sect's response had been very tough, very clear.

According to the rules of the Mount Li Sword Sect, even though Liang Xiaoxiao was dead, he should still have been expelled from the sect and no longer be regarded as a disciple of Mount Li. But in the eyes of Gou Hanshi and the others, this once-brilliant young swordsman was still one of their fellow disciples, let alone the fact that Liang Banhu had originally been his brother.

Hatred and dishonor were just one thing, but how could they so quickly forget the full ten years they spent cultivating together with their fellow disciple?

Tang Thirty-Six asked in confusion, "You really think they aren't targeting you?"

Liang Xiaoxiao had died outside the Garden of Zhou on the outskirts of Hanqiu City at his own hand, but from another angle, didn't he basically die at Chen Changsheng's sword?

It was just like how Zhuang Huanyu had killed himself by the well in the Heavenly Dao Academy, but the teachers and students of the Heavenly Dao Academy, including Famous Name Guan Bai, had still placed the blame squarely on Chen Changsheng's shoulders.

No one had ever talked about whether Chen Changsheng had done anything wrong in this matter, but just as was said a moment ago, grudges had always been clear-cut and had never based themselves on reason.

It was precisely because Tang Thirty-Six had thought of this point that he warned Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng shook his head, musing, "Perhaps...it's just in remembrance."

Tang Thirty-Six raised his brows, not very convinced by this theory.

Zhexiu explained, "What Chen Changsheng means is that if you died, no matter how you died, he would never forget you. Occasionally he would also use the Three Forms of Wenshui to remember you."

Tang Thirty-Six shot him a glare and retorted, "When did you begin to talk so much?"

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An old grudge existed between Tianliang County and the Mount Li Sword Sect, thus causing Scholar Hu and the others to challenge them, yet they had lost three in a row. The cultivators originating from other regions would naturally not seek unwanted attention for themselves, so the scene momentarily became rather deserted.

Then, Zhong Hui stood up.

This was a right and inevitable matter, so right and inevitable that when the crowd saw him walk to the platform and then shifted their gazes to Gou Hanshi, they subconsciously exhaled.

In last year's Grand Examination, Chen Changsheng was first rank of the first banner, Gou Hanshi was second, and Zhong Hui

was third. On the newly issued Proclamation of Golden Distinction, Zhong Hui was still right behind these two people.

In the one and a half years after the conclusion of that Grand Examination, Zhong Hui advanced with lightning speed. He had already cultivated to the peak of Ethereal Opening. Compared with the third rank on the first banner that he had obtained almost by a fluke, his position on the Proclamation of Golden Distinction was the true representation of his status amongst this generation of youths. However, he was still below Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi. So in the Boiling Stone Summit, he naturally wanted to challenge Gou Hanshi and then Chen Changsheng.

He calmly gazed at Gou Hanshi while looking at Chen Changsheng out of the corner of his eyes.

This calm signified his self-confidence.

Guan Feibai was also very self-confident, at the same time very proud. He had always looked down on Zhong Hui, felt like this scholar from Scholartree Manor was feigning calm. With two cold laughs, he prepared to step onto the stage to take the challenge.

Gou Hanshi held back his junior brother—he wanted to show his opponent sufficient respect. Zhong Hui had not opened his mouth, but everyone knew who the true person he wanted to challenge was.

The wind off the lake gently blew against Zhong Hui's sleeves and the fine sand on the stone platform.

Gou Hanshi walked upon the fine sand, leaving a shallow footprint on its surface.

Zhong Hui gazed at him, his expression calm, even somewhat stiff as he unsheathed his sword.

With this action, his sleeves instantly ceased to flutter. This was because the wind had ceased to blow from the lake, chopped into pieces by the sword intent he emitted and vanishing into the air.

Gou Hanshi slightly raised his brows, somewhat surprised.

In the end, rumors and what one saw with one's own eyes were two different things.

Everyone said that Zhong Hui had cultivated to the peak of Ethereal Opening and even had a chance of being the second-fastest extraordinary individual after Qiushan Jun to succeed in Star Condensation. However, only after seeing him with their own eyes and sensing the vanishing of the lake wind could the crowd finally confirm that his sword intent had actually reached such a powerful state, that he was only a step from the threshold.

Gou Hanshi's expression grew more solemn.

The mood over the platform also grew solemn.



However, different from what the crowd imagined, Gou Hanshi's solemnity was not because he realized that he might lose, but because he was thinking about how it seemed that he could no longer conceal his strength.

Not too much time was needed for him to make his decision.

A nearly indiscernible, extremely faint Qi began to emerge from his body.

The fragments of lake wind that had drifted into the sky seemed to be impelled by some force to slowly, yet distinctly, come together once more and leisurely surround his body.

The splendid sun was currently overhead. Although they were at the high and cold summit, the temperature gradually began to warm. The blazing rays of light fell upon the lake and the stones, reflecting and scattering apart, somewhat dazzling to the eyes.

Those bright rays of light could not directly fall on Gou Hanshi's body.

Because his body was surrounded by the silky threads of the lake wind.

The rays of light once more reflected and scattered, still bright, but no longer as dazzling. Moreover, they were sliced by the lake wind into countless specks of light. When these specks of light shone upon his blue garments, it seemed like he was under a tree.

And also like countless stars.

The faintly discernible Qi suddenly became incomparably calm, incomparably clear. Countless bits of stars danced around his face and his clothes, yet did not drift too far away.

The stone platform by the lake was deathly still.

For a very long time, nobody could open their mouths to speak.

Just when those fragments of star began to dance, Zhong Hui's expression changed.

His calm and almost stiff expression was instantly supplanted by shock and a feeling of defeat.

His face was extremely pale, with not a hint of blood to be seen.

After a long time passed, he finally awoke from his daze and shakily said, "I have lost."

As he spoke these three words, he seemed to be in deep suffering.

After saying it, he actually seemed to relax, returning his sword to its sheath and departing.

The stone platform was still quiet.

A clear and gentle voice spoke.

"Congratulations to Senior Brother."

The speaker was Xu Yourong.

Many people had already guessed, or perhaps understood, why Zhong Hui had conceded, but only when she spoke did those people truly dare to believe it, because this fact was truly somewhat inconceivable.

The entire audience was still quiet, a silence that had already persisted for a very long time.

Gou Hanshi had already succeeded in entering Star Condensation.

He himself was very calm, but the disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect found it hard to conceal their pride. Guan Feibai still had that corpse-like face of his, but the gaze he aimed at the people of the Orthodox Academy was rather different.

Chen Changsheng sighed, "Admirable."

Zhexiu noted, "Second fastest."

In this generation of youths, the speed at which Gou Hanshi succeeded in Star Condensation could be ranked second. Mo Yu and Tianhai Shengxue had succeeded in Star Condensation at slightly older ages.

As for the person ranked first, it was naturally Qiushan Jun.

Tang Thirty-Six was expressionless as he whispered, "You have to hurry up."

He was naturally speaking to Chen Changsheng.

Gou Hanshi turned in the direction of the Orthodox Academy and slowly nodded at Chen Changsheng.

He had not spoken, but Chen Changsheng understood his meaning.

After a moment of silence, he stood up.

The crowd was in an uproar.

# Chapter 588 - Letting Go

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The uproar was the culmination of many voices.

Voices of discussion, sighs of emotion.

The relationship between the Mount Li Sword Sect and the Orthodox Academy was no longer as antagonistic as it had been in the very beginning, just as Gou Hanshi had said to his junior brothers before entering Mount Han.

They weren't enemies, but they were still rivals.

Even if they had no hostility against each other, they would still have to meet, to meet once more.

The Mount Li Sword Sect had effortlessly repelled the experts of Tianliang County that had been brimming with hostility. Gou Hanshi had displayed his Star Condensation cultivation and forced Zhong Hui to withdraw without a single word.

The situation had very naturally developed to this point, until finally, it was time for him and Chen Changsheng to meet.

It had been almost two years since that final match of the Grand Examination. In these two years, many things had happened, so would the result of this battle change?

In this world, only Chen Changsheng and Gou Hanshi were well-versed in the Daoist Canon. They possessed a cultivation and talent that their peers would find it hard to strive for. The crowd deeply desired to know just which of them was stronger.

Gou Hanshi had already succeeded at Star Condensation while Chen Changsheng had not. Logically, it was impossible for him to be a match for Gou Hanshi, but everyone knew of those events that occurred in front of the Orthodox Academy's gate in the summer of last year. To ordinary cultivators, surpassing cultivation levels to defeat Star Condensation experts was an unimaginable feat, but this was not at all difficult for Chen Changsheng. But the crowd was still not completely supportive of Chen Changsheng because even though it had not been long since Gou Hanshi had entered Star Condensation, he was still Gou Hanshi. Solely from his name, one could affirm that he was assuredly no ordinary initial level Star Condensation cultivator.

Chen Changsheng stood up and began to walk towards the stone platform, countless gazes tracking him as he moved.

Gou Hanshi was also watching him, very calm and very serious.

Just at this moment, a clear sound came from a room of the pavilion by the lake.

This clear sound was the plucking of a zither, like the crashing of the waves against the shore.

Soon after came the second note from the zither, and then it

continued without pause.

This tune was extremely refined. It was obvious from its sound that the zither player was a person who had deeply studied music, each finger lightly pressing on the zither strings rich with emotion. It was just that for some reason, at certain shifts in the music, the zither player would make mistakes that not even a beginner would make—a distinct transition and pause.

"Who is playing the zither?"

Many people turned to the building from which the zither sound was emerging as they thought this question, and there were even a few people that added a few words to this question.

Which person would dare to play the zither at this time?

This building's door was closed. Some people recalled that ever since a few days ago, that building's door had been closed and never opened. As it turned out, someone was actually in there.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets turned to the building and shook his head. He naturally knew who the person inside was, but he had not expected that the person would not be dissuaded by his advice and still insisted on fighting.

"It seems that we can only leave our match for the future."

Gou Hanshi gazed at Chen Changsheng on the platform and said.

At this point, he had already figured out through the music who the zither player was.

Chen Changsheng had as well and replied, "Hopefully not too long."

There were many people that could recognize who the zither player was. The sounds of discussion rose up and then quieted down as countless gazes were cast upon the building, faintly growing excited.

The zither player was Guan Bai.

The true leader of the Heavenly Dao Academy's young generation, Famous Name Guan Bai.

Gou Hanshi truly did want to exchange a few pointers with Chen Changsheng, but upon hearing the zither, he was forced to yield.

The crowd had truly anticipated Gou Hanshi and Chen Changsheng's match, but they wanted to see Chen Changsheng and Guan Bai's match even more.

Because the people of the continent had already been waiting for this match for an entire year.

In the summer of last year, the gate of the Orthodox Academy had been incomparably lively, but Guan Bai had not taken the stage. He had only quietly stood on a street and glanced at Chen



Changsheng.

He had not said anything.

But many people in the capital knew.

He had given Chen Changsheng one year to mature.

After that glance, no trace of Guan Bai could be found. It seemed like this expert of the sword belonging to the Heavenly Dao Academy had disappeared.

It now seemed that Guan Bai had secluded himself to secretly cultivate precisely in preparation for today's battle.

With a light creak, the door of the distant building was slowly pushed open.

A man walked out of the building, his posture tall and straight, his expression gentle and serene, his temples unstained by dust.

He was Guan Bai, but he was different from the Guan Bai of the past, a Guan Bai different from the impressions he had left in a few people that knew Guan Bai.

The Guan Bai of the past had always been traveling, his body covered in dust, his sharpness threatening.

Anyone that looked at Guan Bai would feel that a sword glow was flashing in their eyes, even cry tears of pain from the sword intent exuded by his body.

The present Guan Bai still had a longsword hanging from his waist, but it remained safely sheathed, not revealing a hint of its edge.

The sunlight of high noon drenched the stone platform, seeming exceptionally fiery and particularly bright.

Guan Bai slowly walked over.

It was absolutely quiet, several hundred gazes following him as he walked, the crowd gradually parting to open a path.

Suddenly, the crowd seemed to grow restless and gradually began to let out cries of surprise. They seemed to have seen something that they found particularly shocking.

Tang Thirty-Six stood up and looked over, his expression instantly turning solemn.

Chen Changsheng had already seen it and his expression was very grave.

With the gentle caress of the lake wind, the sleeve drifted in the air.

Guan Bai's sleeve gently drifted in the air, at times curling up.

His right arm...had actually been severed!

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There was an uproar, a true uproar, cries of alarm continuously being heard. Everyone had believed that Guan Bai had been living this year like he had the past few, continuing his travels or concealing his identity to kill demons in the battlefields of the north, or even secretly cultivating in preparation for this match. Who could have imagined that when he once more appeared before the masses, he would actually be missing an arm!

Even more shocking was that his right arm had been severed.

In the past, many people viewed Guan Bai as the genius in the path of the sword most likely to enter the top ten of the Proclamation of Liberation. He was much younger than the experts of Wang Po's generation.

Now, he didn't even have the right hand which he used to hold his sword...would this once-genius of the sword really sink down into the mundane world?

Under these stunned gazes, Guan Bai reached the stage. After bowing to the Elder of Heavenly Secrets and Xu Yourong, he very naturally arrived at the platform upon which the people of the Orthodoxy were seated.

No matter what, he was still a person of the Heavenly Dao Academy and also a person of the Orthodoxy.

He bowed to Linghai Zhiwang and Mao Qiuyu.

It was plain to see that Linghai Zhiwang and Mao Qiuyu knew that his arm was severed. Linghai Zhiwang said, "Just try your best."

As the previous Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy, Mao Qiuyu naturally felt rather complex. He wanted to speak but then stopped, finally just sighing, "You came."

Guan Bai replied, "In the end, I had to come."

He then turned to Chen Changsheng, very calmly and precisely bowing.

Chen Changsheng did not avoid him. After receiving the bow, he bowed back.

Guan Bai quietly looked back and also did not avoid him, receiving the bow.

A nearly indiscernible light gleamed in his eyes, clear and somber like the autumn sun high in the sky.

"Everyone is waiting for you, come," he said to Chen Changsheng.

After saying this, that sword glow vanished into the depths of his pupils, no longer visible.

Chen Changsheng looked at his empty sleeve and said, "I don't think it's proper."

Guan Bai replied, "In this year, no other miracles occurred on your body and I also had to learn how to use the sword with my left hand. It's very fair, we can fight without our hands tied."

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng replied, "Why can't you let go?"

"There's no person who has let their hand go more thoroughly than me," Guan Bai smiled and replied.

His hand was already gone; did he still need to put down his hands? It was just that there were some matters that he still could not put down.

His smile faded and he calmly said to Chen Changsheng, "No

matter how unbearable Huanyu was, in the end, he was still my junior brother."

Yes, there were many matters that could not be put down.

Although Liang Xiaoxiao had colluded with the demons, his crimes unpardonable, Gou Hanshi and the other disciples of the Mount Li Sword Sect would still cherish his memory.

Just like Zhexiu had said, if Tang Thirty-Six really did something in the future that would enrage both god and man, Chen Changsheng would still find it impossible to detest and reject him.

These things called grudges had always been insoluble, incomprehensible.

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# Chapter 589 - Straight Sword

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Guan Bai had given his explanation and now, it was up to Chen Changsheng whether or not he wanted to accept it.

To him, this truly was a rather more troublesome problem. Many people felt that at least today, he should not step forward.

Guan Bai was not one of those initial level Star Condensation cultivators that had lost to him, but a true master of the sword, his cultivation level far above Chen Changsheng's. More importantly, Guan Bai had somehow been heavily injured, his right arm severed. Even if it was as he said, that he had relearned how to use the sword with his left arm, it was impossible for him to have returned to his peak condition. Even if Chen Changsheng went all out and won over him, there would be no glory in it.

He was the future Pope. If he won, he would attract criticisms. If he lost, it would be extremely humiliating. The best method was to not accept his opponent's challenge at all.

It was very quiet, all eyes on Chen Changsheng as they awaited his decision. No one dared to urge him, but the silence and these gazes created an invisible pressure.

It was at this moment that a clear and cold voice could be heard through those layers of white curtain. "The road of cultivation is long and endless, but since you've already stepped upon it, how can you stop? As long as you incessantly press forward, there will come a time when you walk to that day. There's no need to worry about

whether you arrive early or late, let alone a need to care about victory or defeat, and why should the slander or praise of the world disorder your heart? Could it be that you haven't even understood this yet?"

There were not more than ten people who could speak to Chen Changsheng with such a tone. Of those present, only the Elder of Heavenly Secrets and...Xu Yourong had the right.

The speaker was Xu Yourong, her voice clear and cold, even somewhat indifferent. It was difficult to ascertain the emotions behind it.

Many people followed the voice to the canopy of white curtains on the high platform and the faintly discernible figure of the beauty within. They began to feel strange because a strange atmosphere had descended over the scene.

Xu Yourong's words seemed to be encouragement, but if interpreted through another angle, it was more like goading, even ridicule.

When the crowd thought of this, they couldn't help but sigh as they thought, even the Holy Maiden with her brightly lit Dao heart still has some resentment from the humiliation she received in the capital from the ending of the engagement.

When the people of the Mount Li Sword Sect heard this, however, they began thinking about other things.



Guan Feibai looked to Gou Hanshi and asked uncertainly, "Seeing Junior Sister's response, Eldest Brother...might still have a chance?"

Gou Hanshi was well-versed in the Daoist Canon, but he truly was not clear on these matters.

The only person present that understood the whole truth of the matter was Tang Thirty-Six. When he saw those expressions on the crowd and the activity from the Mount Li Sword Sect, his lips turned into a sneer as he thought with derision, how can any of you understand the unreasonable and different sort of loving affection this young couple display to each other.

They believed that Xu Yourong was ridiculing Chen Changsheng with these words.

Tang Thirty-Six knew that she was not, and Chen Changsheng was even more certain that she was not. He understood her meaning.

Cultivation required continuous tempering, advancing required continuous challenges. Victory and defeat were not important; slander and praise mattered even less.

If he wanted to break through, he needed to learn to disregard all these things and return to the essence of cultivation.

By means of his realizations of life, by means of his extraordinary

perception that he had obtained through battle, by means of the powerful mental strength that he had obtained from that greatest of pressures that came from living between life and death.

He did not turn to her behind the white curtains, rather turning his gaze towards that warm mist in the heart of the lake. Finally, he drew back his gaze to look at Guan Bai on the stone platform.

The lake gently gusted, blowing about the dust on the stone slabs, Guan Bai's empty sleeve, and his own sleeves.

He walked onto the stone platform and stood before Guan Bai.

This was the first time that many people were able to see him up close.

The crowd realized that the legendary Chen Changsheng was not very handsome, but his appearance was very clean, and he gave off the feeling of underripe youth.

He stood there like a refreshing spring breeze that was free from the constraints of the earth.

Sounds of discussion, sighs of emotion, and comments of praise could be heard from the crowd.

Guan Bai was very calm. Saying nothing more, he took the longsword from his waist and raised it in the air before him.

He only had one hand now, so how would he unsheathe his sword?

His hand slowly proceeded up the sword and when it arrived at the hilt, his fingers slightly increased their strength and tightened their grip.

With melodious ring, the sword sheath slowly slid down, revealing the bright sword.

This was a very beautiful sight.

It was just like the [several dozen mu](#) of green moss growing on the surface of a lake, slowly being rolled up by a gale and then taken away.

(TN: A mu is Chinese measure of area that is equivalent 0.1647 acres.)

It was even more like a general, stained by blood and dust, slowly and firmly removing his armor, revealing his body brimming with strength.

This was taking off one's armor.

[Taking off one's armor](#) did not always mean that one intended to return to one's home—it could also be the prelude to a magnificent battle.

(TN: 卸甲归田, 'taking off one's armor and returning home', is a Chinese idiom that means retirement from office.)

Or perhaps this was a battle that was returning to its very essence, a childish and clumsy battle.

This battle was not influenced by any external factors, was not entangled by the interests of any factions, and had no bets or gambles on the line. It was purely a battle.

What was compared was strength, what they strived for was victory, what they wanted was joy.

In just the simple act of pulling a sword from its sheath, Guan Bai had completely displayed his intentions and will to fight.

The eyes of many people brightened.

Especially the eyes of cultivators like Guan Feibai.

Who didn't like this sort of battle?

Even Tang Thirty-Six felt his body grow somewhat hot, subconsciously walking towards the stage and coming to where the people of the Mount Li Sword Sect were standing, wanting to be even closer to this battle.

Only Zhexiu had no response, his expression still indifferent,

unable to gather any interest. Unlike what the common people imagined, he truthfully had no love for battle. In his view, the purpose of battle was to slay one's enemy. Victory, joy and these other sorts of things showed an excessive lack of understanding.

(TN: This paragraph actually ends with a Chinese idiom, 何不食肉糜, which translates to 'why don't they eat meat?'. This question was the solution proposed by Emperor Hui of Jin when told that his people were starving from lack of rice, reflecting his poor understanding of the situation. A similar phrase is 'let them eat cake', purportedly said by Marie Antoinette.)

In the next moment, the fighting intent of the crowd which had been stirred up swiftly vanished.

The light in the eyes of Guan Feibai and the rest instantly vanished, replaced by stupefaction and defeat.

Because a sword intent had appeared on the peak of Mount Han.

This sword intent came from the sword in Guan Bai's hand, from his brows and eyes, from his tightly bound black hair, and also from his vacant sleeve. It came from every pore of his body.

This sword intent was incomparably awe-inspiring, incomparably dense. The gravel and bits of grass that had previously been shattered by Liang Banhu's and Guan Feibai's sword intents were now cut into even finer grains.

The lake and wind that had been chopped apart and then reformed were once more sliced apart, countless slashes appearing

on them. Moreover, for a moment, they could not reform, and the scene was somewhat wondrous.

It was a powerful sword intent, such that even people as proud and self-confident as Guan Feibai and Tang Thirty-Six were forced to admit that they were no match for this sword intent.

The crowd was full of cries of surprise, but then they became even quieter than before.

All eyes were on Guan Bai, overflowing with shock and reverence.

He was truly worthy of being an expert of the Proclamation of Liberation, the Famous Name of the Heavenly Dao Academy. Guan Bai had lost an arm and his strength had been heavily damaged, but not only did his strength not decrease, he even seemed to advance one more step on the path of the sword!

Just like Xu Yourong had said to Chen Changsheng a moment ago, opportunity often arose from defeat, breakthroughs often originated from trials of life-or-death.

In the capital last year, because of that stray dog's miserable encounter in the alley, Guan Bai had refused to let the old Daoist nun depart, which led to his suffering the greatest humiliation and beating of his life.

He left the capital and secluded himself in a remote mountain

village. He used half a year to recover from his severed arm and then he began to quietly contemplate.

By the creek running along the cliff, by the pond behind the farmhouse, he calmly and seriously thought for a very long time.

He confirmed that he had not done anything wrong on that night. Disregarding the fact that he was an expert of the Proclamation of Liberation, even if he were still a child of five or six that did not know how to cultivate, he still would have stood there.

Because this matter was right, it should be done, so why should he understand, why should he care who that old Daoist nun was? Why should he regret?

No, no regret.

Guan Bai had no idea that the question he had considered by the creek and next to the pond had been considered many years ago by a person called Wang Po, had been pondered in the wilderness of Tianliang County.

After Wang Po thought through this question, he finally possessed his own path of the blade.

Although this path of the blade was far from the power and terror of Zhou Dufu's path of the blade, in terms of level, it was already worthy of being discussed on the same terms.

This path of the blade was called 'straight'.

After Guan Bai had thought through this question, he also came to have his own path of the sword, also called 'straight'.

On that day, when the mountains were filled with maple leaves, and the cicadas incessantly chirped by the pond, his path of the sword achieved great success.

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Chen Changsheng sensed Guan Bai's sword intent and his heart was filled with admiration.

He regarded Wang Po as an idol, so it was impossible for him to not like this sword intent.

In addition, he faintly understood just what Guan Bai had encountered in the capital.

He deeply admired the fact that this man could recover from his severed arm in the course of a short year and that he had even advanced in terms of his level on the path of the sword, but he admired even more the reason this man had been so heavily wounded.



Such a person, such a sword intent—how to respond? Naturally, it could also only be 'straight'.

With a boom, the snowy plain within his body began to explosively blaze, transforming into boundless true essence which was conveyed through those narrow meridians to every place of his body.

His body seemed to drag an afterimage behind it, then transformed into a straight line and crossed the stone platform to thrust at Guan Bai.

This attack was incomparably straight.

# Chapter 590 - Wait For What?

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The lake wind poured into the sleeve of the Daoist robe, causing it to flap about like a great flag.

The Stainless Sword pierced through the air as if it was about to ignite.

Out of respect, and also because of Guan Bai's strength, Chen Changsheng did not hold anything back. He used his most powerful Blazing Sword, and the position and angle of his attack were naturally chosen by the Intellectual Sword.

This attack seemed incomparably straight, but in reality, its course was constantly fluctuating.

Guan Bai quietly stood at his original position, his sword unmoving, his Domain already formed.

With a rip, a small hole appeared on Chen Changsheng's sleeve.

His sword had also already arrived in front of Guan Bai.

In the wilderness, Su Li had once said that it was very difficult to find a perfect Star Domain in the current world.

But the present situation was completely different from what Su Li had spoken of. It was not because Chen Changsheng's sword

could not find the gap in Guan Bai's Star Domain, but because Guan Bai had voluntarily opened his Star Domain.

It was very similar to the decision Liang Wangsun had made when confronting Chen Changsheng's sword in Xunyang City.

They were both experts of the Proclamation of Liberation and so their knowledge of how to deal with opponents often had similarities.

Although Guan Bai had cultivated to a high level on the path of the sword, he did not believe that he could firmly defeat a Chen Changsheng that had personally received instruction on the path of the sword by Su Li.

If he was unable to hold an absolute advantage in terms of swordplay, then instead of forming his Star Domain and passively waiting for his opponent's attacks, it would be better to rely on his advantage in cultivation to firmly receive Chen Changsheng's attacks.

Guan Bai's sword firmly slashed down.

He utterly disregarded Chen Changsheng's attack.

Because he had cultivated to a level far above Chen Changsheng, he believed that his sword would undoubtedly be faster and heavier than Chen Changsheng's, so Chen Changsheng would undoubtedly have to withdraw his sword to defend.

Even greater talent and more exquisite swordplay could not change this fact.

Guan Bai's sword was like a waterfall falling from the sky, carrying along the rumbling of thunder as it descended towards Chen Changsheng. He could only halt his steps and draw back his sword.

This sword that had never turned back in the past was now forced back.

Both the Blazing Sword and the Intellectual Sword had lost their meaning. These two most powerful sword techniques that he had learned from Su Li had been so easily broken.

Fortunately, Su Li had taught him three swords in total, and the third sword was the most ideal for defense.

The Stainless Sword somewhat awkwardly returned in front of him and then was somewhat clumsily inclined towards the sky to meet that waterfall descending from above.

Waterfalls were all found on mountains, and even the firmest mountain would have a deep pool carved from it by the surging of the waterfall.

But within these deep pools could always be seen a few stones covered in moss, washed by water for a thousand years yet

unmoving and unwavering. The firmness was there.

Just like the dagger in Chen Changsheng's hand.

This was the sword that not even Su Li had been able to learn.

Guan Bai's sword energy was like a surging tide but it could not smash through Chen Changsheng's defense.

The sunlight shining over the lake shore instantly seemed to greatly weaken.

Because the clash of two swords was giving forth countless golden stars, as beautiful as a tree of fire.

Boom!

Chen Changsheng was forced back several dozen zhang before finally managing to steady his body.

His Daoist robe was torn, his leather boots coming apart, and a distinct line was drawn on the stone platform.

Guan Bai did not give him any chance to catch his breath, following his sword in pursuit.

He used the Heavenly Dao Academy's Sword of Hithering Light.

Solely in terms of speed, it could be considered without equal.

Countless sword glows illuminated the eyes of the crowd.

It was like the surface of the lake under the sun was covered with innumerable golden lines.

The crisp clashing of swords rang out incessantly, concentrated together until they ultimately became a straight line, dry and monotonous yet also particularly fear-inspiring, like the highest note that could be blown from a flute.

Guan Bai's powerful sword intent rose higher and higher, accompanied by these crisp clashes.

The sword glows over the stone platform became increasingly dazzling, making it difficult for the crowd to look at them directly.

The spectators grew increasingly tense.

Guan Bai's cultivation on the path of the sword was far too powerful.

No matter how exquisite Chen Changsheng's swordplay, how long could he possibly last?

Based on the situation in front of them, the conclusion of this battle already seemed decided.

Xu Yourong sat behind the curtains, no one able to see the concern in the depths of her eyes. Those South Stream Temple disciples waiting upon her saw her tightly clenched hands and still believed that she was growing excited from seeing Chen Changsheng about to lose at his opponent's sword.

The array laid out by the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had long since been activated, countless strands of powerful Qi pouring out of the gray stone by the lake shore and forming a faint barrier of clear light that cut off the two fighters from the outside world.

That clashing of swords that seemed like a straight line finally broke. This did not mean that Guan Bai was no longer able to sustain such a fierce attack. On the contrary, this meant that his sword intent had reached its peak and he no longer needed to deliberately condense sword energy. Now, he could wield his sword freely.

The sword intent became even more awe-inspiring, scoring countless smooth cracks through the stone platform. Even the clear light enveloping the platform faintly showed signs of being cut.

Chen Changsheng and Guan Bai began moving faster and faster, almost transforming into streams of light. They incessantly rushed about the platform at high speeds, hard to see clearly. As for what specific sword techniques the two of them were using, besides the rare few like the Elder of Heavenly Secrets and Linghai Zhiwang, no one could clearly make them out.

After some time had passed, the two figures finally parted.

As the dust settled, the two quietly stared at each other, separated by ten-odd zhang.

Guan Bai was the same as before without the slightest change. On the other hand, Chen Changsheng's appearance was even sorer than before. Innumerable cuts had been made in his Daoist robe, his face was pale, and the hand holding the Stainless Sword was trembling.

Everyone could see that he had suffered significant injuries and was on the verge of collapse, but no one would view him with contempt or disappointment because of this. That he was able to last so long against Guan Bai's sword was already an extraordinary feat. It could not be forgotten that although he was the next Pope, a genius that everyone had high hopes for, he was still a youth not even fully seventeen.

Countless gazes fell on Chen Changsheng's body, everyone waiting to hear his concession.

Conceding was not shameful. No one could win forever. Even people like Zhou Dufu and Su Li had to experience these sorts of things when they were young.

However, in the next moment, Chen Changsheng said something that no one had expected.



He gazed at Guan Bai and said, "Can I trouble Sir to wait for me just a little longer?"

Guan Bai's expression was very calm because he had long thought of this possibility. He had always been waiting for Chen Changsheng, had already waited for a whole year, so why would he care about waiting a little longer?

He crossed his legs and sat on the ground, closing his eyes.

This was his response to Chen Changsheng.

Chen Changsheng looked at him and said with sincerity, "Thank you."

After saying this, he also crossed his legs and sat on the ground, closing his eyes in meditation.

At this point of this battle of swords, both sides had suddenly sat down on the ground and begun to meditate.

This scene was truly a little too bizarre.

The crowd was greatly confused, the sounds of their conversations gradually increasing.

Many people did not understand the meaning of Chen Changsheng asking Guan Bai to wait a little longer.

But some people faintly understood.

Linghai Zhiwang's complexion became incredibly unsightly.

Mao Qiuyu's face revealed an expression of delight.

Gou Hanshi was first shocked, then he silently smiled.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets, however, creased his brow.

# Chapter 591 - The Star In The Daylight

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A few days ago on the island in the lake, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets had said to Chen Changsheng that if he wanted to delay the breaking out of the injuries within his body, he should not continue cultivating. The elder had not expected that not only did Chen Changsheng not listen to his words, he even more fiercely pressed forward. In such a short time, he had made his preparations to break through. The elder could not help but feel anxious and concerned by this.

However, it was already too late. As the lake wind lightly brushed against his Daoist robe, Chen Changsheng's eyes were closed. He was no longer within this world.

His mind returned to its most primal place, the tranquil and deep sea of consciousness.

With the slightest thought, his sea of consciousness began to ripple and raise up almost unimaginably massive waves. These waves were about ten stories high and possessed an extremely astonishing momentum as they endlessly thrust towards the dim sky above.

But the sky was too far away. No matter how massive the waves, they could not touch it. When they reached their peak, they could only fall back down with extreme reluctance, smashing out countless pieces of foam on the sea's surface.

This ocean spray arose from the sea. If it could not break away

from the sea, it naturally could not soar into the sky.

In normal times, if all he wanted to do was send a strand of spiritual sense into the sky, this task would not be difficult at all. However, today, he needed to send even more spiritual sense to the other side.

So he once more moved his thoughts, having them transform into countless sharp weapons, swords and blades, and then...they slashed at his thoughts.

A massive storm burst over his sea of consciousness, countless frenzied gales screaming over the horizon. Transforming into countless seemingly real techniques, they slashed at the raging and rising waves.

The True Sword of the Orthodox Academy, the Mountain Gate Sword of Mount Li, the Three Chants of the Fisherman's Song, the Condensing Frost Sword of the Snow Mountain Sect, the Army-Shattering Sword of Star Seizer Academy, the Sword of Hithering Light of the Heavenly Dao Academy, South Stream Temple's Three Lanes of the Plum Blossom...

Countless sword techniques formed in the tempest and madly danced over the sea!

Those ten-story waves swayed uneasily under these slashes, gradually splitting from the sea. Yet there was still the deepest connection that could not be completely severed.

From the sea came a cry of extreme determination, and then a blade intent descended from the sky!

The first move of the Halving Blade Style, Origin!

This was the most powerful blade style in the world! Before this blade, all things would inevitably be halved!

The massive waves were finally severed from the sea and then began to float!

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Once the massive waves were cut off from the sea, they became a mass of pure water very similar to the lake outside his Ethereal Palace.

Upon losing its connection to the sea of consciousness, this mass of seawater also seemed to lose all of its weight. It lightly floated up to the gloomy sky, floating higher and higher, farther and farther. Ultimately, it followed that path which it had not truly stepped upon for a very long time yet had been making firmer by the day, reaching that sea of stars in the deepest depths of the sky.

This mass of seawater was the essence of his spiritual sense, the soul of his experience, his most precious object.

After reaching the sea of stars, his spiritual sense did not stop, continuing its seemingly slow but actually amazingly fast march forward. After a very long time, it finally arrived at the position on the very edge of the sea of stars.

This place was incomparably far from the ground, the other side of the sea of stars.

Beyond the sea of stars was the void, but beyond the void?

Chen Changsheng gazed far off into the distance. He somehow felt like he could faintly make out countless stars over there.

In the beginning, in the library of the Orthodox Academy, on that night when he lit up his Fated Star, he had this exact same feeling, like he was gazing at the myriad twinkling lights of a city.

It was a pity that it was too far. Which the current strength and compactness of his spiritual sense, he had no means of reaching that side, unable to delve into the true limits of the world.

He drew back his gaze and turned to an unremarkable corner on the edge of the sea of stars. There was an unremarkable star, very small and very red, like an apple.

This was his Fated Star.

His spiritual sense slowly approached it.

This mass of ocean fell upon the small red star. Not only did it fail to cause the star's temperature to drop and its flames to extinguish, it actually made the red flames on its surface grow even more violent!

[Golden winds](#) met with autumn dew, forming a harmonious liquid that spewed limitless radiance into the pitch-black space.

(TN: 'Golden winds meeting with autumn dew' is a Chinese idiom usually used to describe love.)

Surpassing the bounds of space and time, this innumerable radiance traveled from the extremely distant edge of the sea of stars back to the ground and poured into his body!

Boom! The cross-legged Chen Changsheng's body suddenly sunk half a foot into the ground.

This was because the ground in a radius of three zhang around him had sunk down!

The lake wind howled and curled around him, causing his Daoist robe to furiously flap about. The wind poured into his sheath, causing it let out countless wild howls of excitement.

Dust flew into the air and straight into the sky like a pillar of dark smoke, causing that bright sun above to dim.

A person accidentally looked up into the sky and saw that in the gloomy sky, in a place opposite the sun, was a faint spot of light like a star in the night sky.

The problem was that it was currently day, so how could one see a star? How could such a bright star exist in this world?

The person shook his head and cast this absurd idea out of his head, shifting his gaze back onto the stage.

At this moment, only the Elder of Heavenly Secrets was not watching the cross-legged Chen Changsheng but gazing up at the sky.

And it was only he who could confirm that in the gloomy sky, a star really had appeared.

The sea of stars contained the inscrutable force of fate. Even he would find it impossible to determine this star's position, but he knew the reason for its appearance.

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On a normal day at the end of summer, under the blazing sunlight, who would notice the momentary flash of that star? Even if they did notice it, who would dare believe their eyes?



On the outskirts of the capital, in the mountains and fields, the Pope stood in front of the grave of Archbishop Mei Lisha. As he gazed at the name of his old friend on the tombstone, his eyes hid a trace of concern. "At the time, we worried that he might mature too quickly. Now it seems to me that our worries were not without basis."

On the Dew Platform, the highest point of the capital, the Divine Empress stood with her hands held behind her, gazing at a certain place in the sky. The sunlight was dazzling but she never blinked. From that day many years ago when Emperor Taizong expelled her from the Imperial Palace and demoted her to the Hundred Herb Garden, she no longer feared staring directly into the sun. Today, though, she was not even looking at the sun. Mo Yu stood behind her, gazing at her back, uneasily thinking, just what did the Empress see a moment ago that caused her to fall into such a long silence?

In the most majestic and most heavily guarded palace within Xuelao City, the Demon Lord sat on his chair as he listened to his most loyal subordinate report the recent strange movements of the Demon Commander as well as the conflicts between Black Robe and the princes and dukes of the noble clans. He was silent, still carrying the appearance of the middle-aged scholar that he had in Mount Han, but his face was much paler, those mountains and rivers still broken. Rather bored, he waved his hand to indicate that his subordinate should leave then suddenly sensed something. He raised his head up towards the heights of the palace. After a moment of silence, he walked towards a green plant.

It was a persimmon tree that he had brought back from the

stream by Mount Han.

He gazed at a heavy persimmon on the tip of a branch and wrinkled his brow. "It's ripened so quickly?"

# Chapter 592 - His Starry Sky Has Always Been There

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Daoist Ji and Yu Ren walked through open fields.

They did not walk on the official road, did not take a boat to travel on the Luo River. They walked where human tracks appeared the least, deep within the weeds. Their Daoist robes were covered in bits of grass, a mantis crushed to death beneath a walking stick.

Because it was hard for him to walk, Yu Ren was very slow. Daoist Ji had to consider the speed of his disciple and naturally could not walk too fast. However, they had clearly been in the snowy plains to the north of Mount Han just a few days ago, so how had they appeared here, in the plains from which that imposing city could be seen?

That city had no walls, but on this day in which the blue sky seemed to be washed clean, it was still visible from several dozen li away. This was because of the city's high platform, the tall mountain on its outskirts, and its countless other buildings that stretched to the clouds.

Though returning to this place after many years, Daoist Ji showed no emotion on his face, only his usual calm and indifference, or perhaps numbness. Yu Ren had no impressions of the capital, nor did he have any sort of emotion towards it, yet his face still revealed curiosity and yearning. Yet in the next moment, those emotions transformed into graveness and unease.

He gazed at a certain position in the sky, gazing at it for a very long time.

The slightly smothering wind of the plains brushed the black hair hanging over his forehead.

He only had one eye that could see, and staring into the distance for so long made it prone to ache. He rubbed his eye, unable to suppress his suspicions, wondering whether his eye had been seeing things a moment ago.

"You did not see wrong. That was your junior brother's Fated Star."

At some point, Daoist Ji had also begun gazing at the sky. His perpetually calm and emotionless face finally revealed an extremely faint smile. Although this smile was faint, it was rich with emotion.

So many years had already passed, so many that even he had almost forgotten which direction the wind had been blowing when Emperor Taizong had that conversation with him in the Palace of Great Brilliance before returning to the sea of stars.

Hearing Daoist Ji's words, Yu Ren became even more uneasy.

"There is no need to worry, this is a good thing."

After saying this, Daoist Ji continued forward.

Yu Ren gazed at his back, opening his mouth to say something, but no sound would come out. He made signs with his hands, but he could not make him see. He could only shake his head and continue forward.

The wind blew across the grass, opening a path.

Master and disciple walked along this path through the plains, one happy, one concerned.

At the end of this path, the capital loomed.

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On the peak of Mount Han, on the shores of the Heaven Lake, many people had already guessed at what Chen Changsheng was doing, at what he was experiencing. Countless conversations expressing shock rose up, like the buzzing of so many bees, then, in a flash, they all vanished, transforming into absolute silence.

The crowd gazed at the cross-legged Chen Changsheng with faces brimming with shock.

He...was condensing his star!

Back then, in the matches of the Grand Examination, Chen Changsheng had broken into Ethereal Opening mid-match. Could it be that today, he planned to break into Star Condensation? Would this genius of the Orthodoxy who had already created far too many miracles once more shock the entire continent? Then would he succeed or not?

To choose this sort of moment to break through was astounding enough, but the truly important question was still whether he could do it or not.

If he could, it was a miracle. If he could not, it was a joke.

And to barely do it was also not enough.

What was Star Condensation? People who did not understand cultivation but had read a few related books might believe that Star Condensation was a higher level of Purification. One could borrow the limitless radiance granted by the sea of stars in the instant one broke into Star Condensation to raise the strength of one's body to an unimaginable degree...this sort of view was not completely without basis. Human Star Condensation experts, even without condensing their Star Domains, could rely on the strength and power of their bodies to fight directly with demon experts, thus the reasoning.

But the true importance of Star Condensation rested in the four words 'condensing the Star Domain'.

Borrowing the fierce radiance of the stars, cultivators could directly open many of the meridian cycles within their bodies, doing their utmost to open as many of the three-hundred-plus Qi openings in their body as possible. From this, they would be able to obtain an unending and growing amount of true essence that would never be exhausted under normal circumstances. The star radiance would be expressed outwards, forming a world. Only at this point could one truly be ranked amongst the true experts!

The problem was, how should the radiance of the stars be distributed? How should one select the order and number of Qi openings that would be lit up? These were extremely complex questions. Even an extremely talented and experienced disciple of a large and famous sect would require the assistance of his teachers in a long period of preparation before attempting to condense his star. The smallest lack of attention was highly likely to result in failure, and even a high chance that the star radiance would flow backwards and inflict heavy injuries on the cultivator, resulting in a heavy dip in cultivation level. It might even be serious enough to end any hope of breaking into Star Condensation for the rest of the cultivator's life.

Of the several thresholds of cultivation, although the threshold of Star Condensation was not as dangerous as Ethereal Opening, one could not regard it casually. This was especially the case for the one seeking to break through, who had to possess sufficient experience and comprehension.

No matter how talented Chen Changsheng was, he had still not even reached the age of seventeen. In addition, he did not possess the blood of the true Dragon like Qiushan Jun, floating in and perceiving the sea of the Dao from childhood. He had not even

cultivated for two years, so how could he have had enough time to experience and comprehend?

Even if he did succeed in forcefully breaking through, luckily avoiding any backflow of radiance, if the order in which he opened the Qi openings was not correct or he lit up too many, there was a high possibility that when he condensed his Star Domain, it would be defective. Let alone perfect, there was even some chance that it could be extremely mediocre.

To normal cultivators, just being able to condense a Star Domain was an extraordinary feat. The Star Domains of many of the world's present Star Condensation cultivators were hard to describe as perfect, but he was Chen Changsheng, the future Pope, so what the people demanded of him was naturally different—just like Su Li had once jeered in the wilderness, could that sort of Star Domain be called a Star Domain?

While awaiting the result, everyone in the crowd had different feelings, so the expressions on their faces were also different.

Gou Hanshi's expression was very calm, Guan Feibai's very solemn, Liang Banhu's slightly lonely. These expressions were because they deeply understood Chen Changsheng. Since he had chosen this moment to break through, he must necessarily have made ample preparation and had more than enough confidence.

Zhexiu's expression was very indifferent, but his pupils were slightly constricted. Tang Thirty-Six's face was rather pale, his two hands tightly clenched. They had an even deeper understanding of Chen Changsheng and were also confident that Chen Changsheng



could succeed in breaking through. However, in the end, they were still somewhat nervous, afraid that some accident would occur.

No one knew that the most nervous person was actually Xu Yourong. She sat behind the curtains, her face utterly emotionless, her body slightly leaning forward, as if she was ready to stand at any moment.

That star had lit up in the daytime and its radiance had descended, pouring into Chen Changsheng's body. As a result, the firm stone platform had sunk half an inch, the scenic lake and mountains plunged into silence.

Chen Changsheng's eyes were still shut, but he had already awakened and returned to reality. He performed meditative introspection to inspect the situation in his body. He confirmed that his Ethereal Palace was still wide open, all his true essence beginning to blaze, that star radiance that had been poured into his body almost on the verge of breaking out of his control. He knew what he should choose.

Of course, he wanted to condense a perfect Star Domain, and he was confident that he could do it.

Star Condensation required a long period of comprehension, perception, and preparation? Although he had cultivated for less than two years, he had already paid many years for its sake. His method of cultivation had always been different from the rest.

Before he succeeded in Purification, he was already performing

Meditative Introspection. When he was drawing in starlight for Purification, he had actually always been at Ethereal Opening. He had always been using methods beyond his actual level to cultivate.

Last year in the Mausoleum of Books, he that was still in the Ethereal Opening Realm was already beginning to condense his star.

In the wilderness, Su Li had passed the Intellectual Sword to him. When he was sitting by the lake, gazing at the starry sky while pondering how to break the Star Domains of Star Condensation experts, he was simultaneously pondering how to cast the sea of stars into his own body, what order he should light up his Qi openings, what sort of Star Domain he should condense.

His starry sky had long been in that place.

He was only waiting for the moment to light it up.

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# Chapter 593 - The Heavenly Dao Cannot Be Defied

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At this moment, not a single strand of wind blew across the stone platform, nor was there any noise. Suddenly, there was a dull rumble of thunder.

This was a somewhat strange thunder because it did not resound through the real world, but through the seas of consciousness of the crowd.

This thunder came from the cross-legged Chen Changsheng's body. It did not come from the rumbling vibrations of the air, but from a sharp increase in true essence and the blazing of the Qi openings.

A certain place around Chen Changsheng's chest suddenly grew bright. The light emerged from his body, passed through his shabby Daoist robe, and shone on the eyes of everyone present.

He had lit up the Qi opening there.

This was followed soon after by more and more rumbles of thunder. This thunder seemed to come from beyond the heavens, but in reality, it came from his body.

More and more specks of light began to clearly emerge from the depths of his Daoist robe. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to the order the Qi openings were lit up, nor any sort of

connection. If one were to connect these Qi openings with a line, one would only get an extremely carelessly drawn picture with nothing special about it whatsoever.

With the passing of time, the atmosphere grew increasingly tense, the gazes focused on Chen Changsheng's body increasingly concerned. He had already lit up many of his body's Qi openings and his Daoist robe was getting brighter and brighter, looking just like a lantern made of colored glass, inside and outside both incomparably bright.

Only at this point did the thunder finally cease, did he finally stop using star radiance to light up his Qi openings. The crowd found it utterly impossible to see just how many Qi openings he had lit. Was it several dozen like ordinary cultivators, or one hundred or two hundred like those cultivators with outstanding talent?

The quiet world around Chen Changsheng began to move. The breeze over the lake lightly caressed him, ruffling his torn-up Daoist robe. The light emitted by the Daoist robe gradually grew fainter, revealing specks of light like stars.

Although those points of light seemed chaotic, in reality, they had their own laws. They were the countless stars of the night sky formed into a complete star chart.

This was a Star Domain.

Chen Changsheng opened his eyes. His eyes were still as clean as

ever, but compared to before, there were some very subtle changes. Their depths faintly emitted the radiance of the stars, seeming like jade washed by water over countless years. A great transformation had occurred with his Qi. It had become more condensed, more powerful.

The gentle wind ruffled his Daoist robe. As he stood up, star fragments drifted from his sleeve and slowly danced in the air.

Those star fragments gradually vanished, the countless stars on his Daoist robe gradually dimmed, but an invisible protective screen still remained.

He was still standing at his original position, but he was no longer within this world.

It was deathly still.

Chen Changsheng had succeeded at condensing his star!

And the Star Domain he had condensed seemed so complete, even giving off a feeling of perfection!

Previously when Gou Hanshi had been facing Scholartree Manor's Zhong Hui and had displayed his Star Condensation cultivation, he had filled the crowd with extreme shock and admiration, but what about now?

Chen Changsheng had broken Qiushan Jun's records and had

become history's youngest Star Condensation cultivator!

The silence was finally broken by the excited discussions and shocked sighs of emotion, and the place became extremely lively.

Seeing Chen Changsheng open his eyes, Tang Thirty-Six finally unclenched his fists and turned to Guan Feibai, perking his brows with an indescribable sense of satisfaction.

Guan Feibai did not look at him, nor did he look at Chen Changsheng. Instead, he was gazing at the slowly rising Guan Bai, his face full of respect.

Many other people were also looking at Guan Bai with expressions of respect and admiration.

It was only at this point that some people finally understood why Chen Changsheng had asked Guan Bai to wait a while.

And Guan Bai really had quietly waited.

This sort of demeanor truly did make others gasp in admiration.

Some gazes also turned to the high platform and the beautiful figure behind the curtains.

Those people were thinking, Chen Changsheng succeeded in breaking into Star Condensation. The Holy Maiden's mood must

certainly be very poor.

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Chen Changsheng sensed that star in the distant sky, felt the power of its radiance, felt the endless true essence circulating through his meridians, brimming with emotion.

Because he had comprehended and prepared for such a long time, he was very confident in being able to condense a perfect Star Domain. But the Star Domain was one matter. To him, the most important part of succeeding in condensing his star was that he would partially be able to address the problem of the limits imposed on his use of true essence by his clogged and fractured meridians. There was even a chance that he would be able to borrow that strength to directly break through those blocks in his meridians.

He now felt that his body was brimming with boundless strength. He was confident that if the Demon Lord appeared again, if he opened the Yellow Paper Umbrella, he would be able to block at least two attacks. This also meant that even if he was fighting against one of the supreme experts of the world, he would be able to protect his life for at least an instant.

Although an instant could not bring him ten thousand li, could not last him one hundred years, it was enough to use all the methods he had hidden away, allow him to find a method to break

through space and enter the Garden of Zhou. And as long as he entered the Garden of Zhou, he was confident that neither the Demon Lord nor any other frightening expert would be able to kill him in such a short time.

The result of his calculations was perfect, providing a great relief to his mind. The true essence flowing through his body and the sense of overflowing power strengthened this sensation. The increase in perception brought by breaking into Star Condensation also caused the lake and mountains in his eyes to appear all the more vivid. In brief, he had never felt the world to be this beautiful.

A few nights ago, he and Xu Yourong had a long conversation, making him resolve to break into Star Condensation during the Boiling Stone Summit in pursuit of this sense of relief.

Thus he had accepted this opponent's challenge despite clearly understanding that he was far weaker. He wanted to use this pressure to break down that most crucial wall. Of course, he most needed to thank his opponent for giving him this opportunity and to even so freely give him enough time.

Chen Changsheng seriously bowed to Guan Bai, his expression sincere. "Many thanks to Senior Brother."

Guan Bai did not avoid it. He had given Chen Changsheng one year of time precisely because he wanted to see if Chen Changsheng could succeed in breaking into Star Condensation in a year.



"As expected, you did not disappoint me, did not disappoint the world."

He looked at Chen Changsheng and said, "But today's battle of swords, I still must win."

In this match, Guan Bai was fighting in place of the Heavenly Dao Academy's Zhuang Huanyu, who had committed suicide by the cold well. He had the dignity of a master of the sword, the bearing of the young leader of the Heavenly Dao Academy. He could give Chen Changsheng enough time to break into Star Condensation, even act as his protector, but he would not let Chen Changsheng leave in the position of victor.

After succeeding in condensing his star, Chen Changsheng had accomplished his most important goal for coming to Mount Han. The expectations of both the Pope and Su Li had all been achieved. He had no interest in the Heavenstones, even though he knew that the small black stone on the plate probably had some secret connection to Wang Zhice. He did not care about the outcome of this battle and could just leave, but because of his gratitude and respect towards Guan Bai, he had to seriously fight this battle to the end, to gift his first battle after breaking into Star Condensation to his opponent.

He raised the Stainless Sword in his hands and pointed it at Guan Bai, calm and respectful.

Guan Bai's left hand raised his sword and very casually slashed it

down from above to below.

Above was the heavens, below was the earth.

To go from above to below was to descend from the heavens.

But this strike was not a waterfall descending from the sky, it was a drifting cloud high in the sky, carrying a far more profound and long-lasting meaning.

Upon seeing this seemingly simple strike, Gou Hanshi's expression instantly turned extremely grave.

The hair on Zhexiu's temples suddenly floated up like steel wires.

The beautiful figure behind the curtains seemed to faintly move forward.

They saw the terrifying aspect of Guan Bai's strike.

While Chen Changsheng was condensing his star, Guan Bai did not waste his time. He also sat cross-legged on the floor, accumulating and comprehending.

Guan Bai was comprehending the surrounding heaven and earth, the lakes and stones behind him. And when Chen Changsheng was condensing his star, Guan Bai was comprehending the changes in the heaven and earth, the activity of the lake and stones. From

these, he sought out those laws and then refined them.

This strike of his was no longer strength, but law.

The law of the heavens and earth was the Heavenly Dao.

Although this strike of his was still far from being the true Heavenly Dao, it was still an incomparably real sword of the Heavenly Dao.

The Heavenly Dao Academy served in these past one hundred years as the head of the Six Ivies, so it naturally had its own extraordinary aspects. Its most outstanding aspect was its Daoist techniques that perceived the Heavenly Dao above.

As the previous Principal of the Heavenly Dao Academy, Mao Qiuyu was naturally incredibly familiar with this strike of Guan Bai's.

His face revealed regret, nostalgia, gratification, and many other emotions.

In his view, it was impossible for Chen Changsheng to receive this attack, even after breaking into Star Condensation and leaping forward in cultivation.

The Heavenly Dao Sword was the most powerful attack of the Heavenly Dao Academy. This attack required the sword wielder to bring his spirit and soul to their most perfect level and then fuse

together the surrounding heavens and earth into one before being able to use it.

Cultivators on the same level could not block this strike. Even the one using the technique would not be able to stop once this technique was put into motion.

Because the Heavenly Dao could not be defied, the Heavenly Dao could not be reversed.

If a normal cultivator, who had just broken into Star Condensation and whose cultivation was still unstable in place, confronted Guan Bai's Heavenly Dao Sword, perhaps they would be filled with thoughts of giving up.

But Chen Changsheng did not, even though when he saw that sword descend from the sky, he knew that he had not much chance of winning against Guan Bai. He still wanted to try and receive this attack.

Precisely because this strike signified the Heavenly Dao.

In these past years in his struggle against fate, what he wanted to oppose was precisely the Heavenly Dao. He had to win, or at the very least, he could not lose that heart of his that dared to challenge the Heavenly Dao.

So not only did he not retreat, he took one step forward to confront this sword of the Heavenly Dao.

With this single step came a dense cacophony of thunder like countless tiny storms were forming in his body and beginning to furiously revolve.

Boom! The star radiance within ten-some Qi openings began to erupt and then connect into lines. Just like that, one of his blocked meridians was unclogged!

Everyone present could clearly sense that the Qi he emitted was much more powerful than before!

But it was still not enough to help him defeat the Heavenly Dao.

He very calmly took another step forward.

As his foot fell, the wind rose up and his Daoist robe madly danced. Although it was a tattered garment, it was like a war flag.

Another blocked meridian was unclogged and his Qi increased in power once more!

Soon after, the third step fell!

And yet...there was no thunder, no wind.

There was no sound, only silence.

His brow creased, somewhat pained, somewhat astonished.

He turned his head to a certain place, seemingly in incredible pain. It seemed like even this simple action had expended all his energy.

That place was a high platform cut off by curtains.

He gazed at that beautiful silhouette behind the curtains, his expression a little perplexed, his appearance very helpless.

Just what had happened?

He stood on the stone platform, his face pale, as if he was incapable of performing the slightest action.

And at this moment, the sword of the Heavenly Dao had already slashed down.

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# Chapter 594 - I Will Fight This Battle For Him (I)

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Chen Changsheng collapsed.

His eyes were tightly shut and he was already unconscious. He collapsed with decisiveness, like a tree on a hilltop blown over by the wind, like a mountain being shaken apart, like the undermining of the earth.

Guan Bai was already in front of him, his sword also there. Seeing Chen Changsheng collapse, his face revealed shock and confusion, yet it was already impossible for him to halt the sword in his hands. This sword represented the will of the Heavenly Dao. Even though the sword was in his hands, he was no longer its master.

Just what had occurred? Why had Chen Changsheng suddenly collapsed?

These questions had just appeared in the minds of the crowd, so no one had time to prevent the coming tragic consequence. Because no one could have imagined that the moment after he broke into Star Condensation and shocked the entire crowd, he would fall into such a strange situation.

Gou Hanshi believed that even if Chen Changsheng was not Guan Bai's match, he would at least be able to receive one attack. This was because he understood Chen Changsheng. If he did not have enough confidence, he would not have taken that first step.

Zhexiu and Tang Thirty-Six were even more confident in Chen Changsheng. They even groundlessly believed that Chen Changsheng would be able to defeat Guan Bai's Heavenly Dao Sword despite the fact that no one was optimistic about his chances.

Mao Qiuyu had the greatest understanding of the Heavenly Dao Sword and knew that the user would not be able to call it back once it was unleashed. He was sure that Chen Changsheng would lose, but how could he have expected that Chen Changsheng would not be able to raise his sword or even move?

This thought hadn't even occurred to them, so who would have the ability to so quickly respond in such a short time?

Only the Elder of Heavenly Secrets could change all this. He knew beforehand that Chen Changsheng's body had a hidden illness. Although he was not sure when this hidden illness would break out, he knew that it was somehow related to cultivation. From the moment Chen Changsheng broke into Star Condensation, his brow had been constantly creased as he placed his focus on the platform. Moreover, as an expert of the Divine Domain, he had enough ability to display a powerful enough technique in this small sliver of time. And yet...his incomparably elderly and wrinkled hand still rested on the handrest, faintly trembling, veins barely visible. He still remained on the high platform with no intention of acting.

Could it be that just after Chen Changsheng broke into Star Condensation and should be in high spirits and receiving the



cheers of the crowd, he would just inexplicably die like this under the Heavenly Dao Sword?

The crowd was stunned, their confused emotions finally transforming into real sounds that left their mouths. Just as cries of surprise began to emerge from the crowd, they were instantly suppressed by the howling wind.

A pair of pure white wings pressed against the air with nigh unimaginable speed, stirring up a violent gale.

The layers of curtains on the high platform were instantly torn into countless pieces as a stream of light shot out. The speed of that figure was far too frightening and only a scant few people present could faintly make out two lines of pure white, but nobody could clearly make out those two pure white wings using their unimaginable speed to beat against the air, stirring a violent gale and bringing that figure howling forward!

That stream of light arrived in front of Chen Changsheng.

The Heavenly Dao Sword descended.

A light burst forth like a firework, containing within it countless masterly sword intents, countless exquisite sword styles, but only one extremely unyielding and divine will.

The Sword of Great Light!

Boom!

The waters of the Heaven Lake were jolted off its surface like a waterfall flowing in reverse. The stone platform fiercely trembled as if an earthquake was occurring. Pieces of gravel flew madly about, pervading the entire scene and causing the sun to grow extremely dim.

The dust eventually settled, revealing the scene.

Guan Bai's left lapel now bore an extremely fine cut, but there was no blood. Holding his sword and with a perplexed expression, with no idea what was going on, he looked forward in a daze.

His gaze fell on the ground. A massive hole had appeared on the stone platform.

This hole was much deeper than the depression Chen Changsheng had caused when he was condensing his star, and it was filled with gravel.

Xu Yourong stood at the bottom of this hole, her hand holding the temple sword and her face pale.

Splash! She vomited blood.

The moment the blood fell on the floor, it instantly began to blaze.

Golden-red flames effortlessly melted the gravel on the floor.

This was the true blood of the Heavenly Phoenix. Even though she possessed the blood of the true Phoenix and astonishing talent, receiving Guan Bai's Heavenly Dao Sword in her unprepared state had still severely wounded her.

But in the end, when nobody else was in time to respond, she had managed to hurry in front of Chen Changsheng and receive the sword, forcibly shaking the will of the so-called Heavenly Dao.

She did not let Guan Bai's sword fall on Chen Changsheng's body, not even the smallest strand of sword intent.

The extremely precious temple sword of South Stream Temple, holding deep significance for Holy Maiden Peak, was cast aside by her without hesitation, because she required her hands to be empty.

She hugged the unconscious Chen Changsheng to her chest.

Her snow-white wings slowly descended, softly wrapping him and her within.

Just like in the Garden of Zhou on that isle of reeds.

At this scene, the lake shore was silent, the crowd utterly

dumbfounded.

No one had expected that the first person present to respond, not caring for any dangers to life and willing to suffer heavy injuries to protect Chen Changsheng, would be her.

In their view, she was the least likely person to appear.

Countless gazes fell on Xu Yourong's body, but she cared not.

Just like she did not care about the temple sword thrown amongst the gravel.

She only gazed at Chen Changsheng in her bosom, her face pale, panicked and concerned.

At this moment, she was beautiful, sorrowful, helpless, frail.

No one had ever seen her this way before, not the people of the Mount Li Sword Sect, not the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, and probably not even the Holy Maiden and the Tianhai Divine Empress.

Just what was going on with all of this?

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Zhexiu charged over, but several dozen sword intents rose up in front of him and blocked his path.

The house was in front of him, but he could not get one step closer. The female disciples of South Stream Temple had laid out a sword array in front of the house.

The cultivators attending the Boiling Stone Summit had not been able to bring many teachers and companions. The Orthodoxy and the Holy Maiden Peak had brought the most, a consequence of their status.

A hundred or so disciples from South Stream Temple had escorted Xu Yourong to Mount Han, and now they were standing guard around the house. The sword array of South Stream Temple was extremely famous. In the past, when Zhou Dufu invaded Holy Maiden Peak, it had taken him quite some effort to break through, so no matter how valiant Zhexiu was, it was simply impossible for him to break through.

Zhexiu was expressionless, but in reality, he was extremely concerned about Chen Changsheng's current situation. Upon being forced back by South Stream Temple's sword array and his shoulder gaining a new wound, not only did he not give up on his intention, his viciousness only intensified. A patch of blood appeared in the depths of his pupils and sharp claws emerged from the tips of his fingers. He was preparing to metamorphose, taking out his abilities on the brink of life and death to fight.

But before he could act, he was blocked by another person. It was Tang Thirty-Six, who shook his head as he looked at him.

At the very front of the South Stream Temple sword array, a female disciple stared at the crowd outside the house and said in a weighty voice, "The Holy Maiden has spoken. Anyone that dares to step into this house will be killed without question!"

Yes, not only were Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu barred from the building, even powerful figures of the Orthodoxy like Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang were barred from entering.

Besides the unconscious Chen Changsheng, the only people in that house were Xu Yourong and the Elder of Heavenly Secrets.

# Chapter 595 - I Will Fight This Battle For Him (II)

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Sword intent crisscrossed, sword glows flowed like water. This was the hall in which the people of the Orthodoxy resided, but now it was under the control of Holy Maiden Peak.

Several hundred people stood outside, the Orthodoxy's people standing at the very front. Upon hearing this female disciple from South Stream Temple's declaration, their faces put on nasty expressions. They asked, "Just what does the Holy Maiden want to do?"

This was the question that everyone wanted answered.

The crowd had still not completely awoken from their shock. In the first place, why had Chen Changsheng suddenly fallen unconscious? Could it be that he had failed in breaking through and the star radiance had flowed in reverse? But at the time, everyone had clearly seen that he had succeeded in condensing his own Star Domain. In the past records, there really had been no other cultivator who had experienced this sort of problem.

The second point was the appearance of Holy Maiden Xu Yourong. Just when everyone else was too late to respond and could only look on in shock as the Heavenly Dao Sword descended, she surpassed the expectations of all by appearing on the platform and not hesitating to suffer a heavy wound to block that strike for Chen Changsheng. How had she been able to anticipate this strike? Why had she been willing to block it for Chen Changsheng?

The story of the engagement had circulated throughout the continent for quite some time. Everyone knew of the grievances and resentments that existed between the Divine General of the East's estate and Chen Changsheng, everyone knew that she and Chen Changsheng were enemies, even regarding them as predestined rivals. Yet she had embraced Chen Changsheng to her chest and gazed at him as if nothing else in the world existed, revealing feelings of helplessness and fragility. Who dared to continue believing in those rumors?

Zhexiu was not thinking of these questions, he was only thinking about Chen Changsheng's current situation. To be pushed back by the sword array laid down by the disciples of South Stream Temple was a matter he could not accept. The only reason he did not continue to charge forward was that Tang Thirty-Six stood in his way.

There were very few people in the world that knew of Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng's relationship, and Tang Thirty-Six was one of them.

Now, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets also knew, or perhaps he had merely confirmed his speculations, because he was now within this building, gazing at Xu Yourong.

Xu Yourong sat by the couch, no longer as panicked and helpless as she was before, already back to her customary calm.

But her beautiful appearance was still written over with worry



and concern, her usual bright beauty greatly dimmed.

Her hand softly held Chen Changsheng's hand.

Seeing this sight, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets mentally sighed.

Chen Changsheng was still not awake.

Xu Yourong gazed at the Elder of Heavenly Secrets. She did not speak, but her question was clear.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets shook his head, saying, "His meridians are already severed. No medicine or stone can recover that."

Chen Changsheng was the successor to the Pope, the future of the Orthodoxy. No matter what sort of relationship the Elder of Heavenly Secrets had with the Pope, he could not stand by and see something happen to Chen Changsheng on Mount Han. The countless precious medicines accrued by The Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets had long been delivered within, and a pile of crystals was stacked next to his body, but none of it had any effect on his wounds.

Anyone hearing this would probably feel despair, but Xu Yourong's expression remained calm. She asked, "How many places were severed?"

The human body contained seventy-two meridians and three

hundred and sixty-five Qi openings.

As the Holy Maiden who had been cultivating since she was a child, she knew more than anyone else the position and directions of these meridians and Qi openings, and also clearly understood the serious consequences of these meridians being severed.

She was very concerned about Chen Changsheng's situation, but she had to clarify the situation even more clearly so that future treatment could be more focused.

After a very long silence, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets said, "All of them."

"All of them?" Xu Yourong repeated.

Her delicate, thin, and supple brows arched upwards, seeming like swords.

Her eyes as bright as limpid autumn waters narrowed, also like swords.

She did not trust in the words of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets. Even if Chen Changsheng failed in breaking through and the star radiance flowed backwards, based on the records and medical cases of the past with similar situations, no matter how severe the backlash suffered by the cultivator, it was impossible for all the meridians to be severed in such a short time.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets explained, "His meridians have always had problems. I faintly knew of it in the past, but I did not expect for the problem to be so severe."

Xu Yourong gazed to Chen Changsheng on the couch, gazed at his closely shut eyes, his pale cheeks. She asked, "Just what sort of problem is there with his meridians?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets replied, "His innate sun wheel was destroyed in the womb, blocking and rupturing his meridians. Simultaneously, the walls of his meridians were also made much weaker than a normal person's."

Xu Yourong fell silent for a very long time at these words, the gaze she aimed at Chen Changsheng now tinged with pity.

"Why would a problem occur at this time?"

"I also did not expect for his problem to break out at this point. It now seems to me that when he broke through and the star radiance poured in, it directly broke the walls of his meridians."

"This problem...why had he never attempted to resolve it before?"

"This is an illness, and there is no cure."

"There is no such thing as an illness without a cure," Xu Yourong calmly replied as she gazed at the unconscious Chen Changsheng.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets looked at her with a hint of pity, saying, "This is an illness he has had since he was in the womb—this is his fate."

The world had no illness that could not be cured?

It did—it was fate.

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The stone seal appeared intermittently in the wind and snow.

The Demon Lord stood at the highest point of Xuelao City, looking over the country that he led. His expression was extremely indifferent, the broken mountains and rivers on his face already faded.

In the snowstorm, a thin and small figure slowly approached and then knelt before him.

"Rise," the Demon Lord emotionlessly said.

She stood up, her expression even more indifferent than the Demon Lord's, her voice even colder. "Imperial Father, I want to go to the capital."

As she said these words, she thought of those encounters in the Garden of Zhou, those words Chen Changsheng had said to her, and she subconsciously creased her brow.

In this way, the wide distance between her two eyes seemed to slightly shrink.

"Denied," the Demon Lord impassively declared as he gazed at his daughter.

Nanke's expression did not change. "Chen Changsheng will return to the capital."

The Demon Lord listened in silence.

Just a moment ago, the persimmon on that persimmon tree he had brought back from the stream in Mount Han had ripened, fallen to the white jade steps, and smashed into a pool of fruity pulp. It had looked just like a crushed head.

Only because he had sensed this did he come into the snowstorm to view his country, to ponder matters related to longevity (Changsheng).

His longevity as well as that human called Changsheng.

"I'm very curious to see just who will eat that fruit in the end."

The Demon Lord continued, "No person can resist that allure, just like your elder brother."

The aroma exuded by the ripened fruit was just like the throne of the Demon Lord which represented supreme authority.

Nanke calmly replied, "I will kill him."

It was unknown whether the 'him' here was referring to Chen Changsheng or that elder brother of hers.

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Daoist Ji and Yu Ren entered the capital and also didn't enter the capital.

They had gone to the Mausoleum of Books. In an apple tree grove on the east face of the mausoleum, they had found a thatched hut to temporarily stay in.

Perhaps it was because of the existence of the Mausoleum of Books, but nobody in the capital sensed the return of this party which was involved with that bloody incident in the Orthodox Academy.

The Mausoleum Guardian sitting under the pavilion at the end of the Divine Path, the number one Divine General of the continent, Han Qing, also seemed to be asleep.

Summer was quietly passing and autumn was on the verge of arrival.

Yu Ren went outside the grove to the abandoned garden nearby to pick some peppers. Because it was difficult for him to walk, he didn't walk far before he grew tired and extended his hand to lean against a tree for a brief rest.

With just this gentle touch, quite a few apples fell from the tree and rolled around. They must have been quite ripe already.

Yu Ren showed an expression of joy, crouching down to pick an apple and have his master try it later tonight.

However, the moment his hand touched the apple, his expression changed.

For some reason beyond his understanding, he felt a deep sadness.

He suddenly greatly missed his junior brother.

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The Heavenly Tome Monoliths were the source of all the Orthodoxy's knowledge.

The starry sky was the focus of all the Orthodoxy's drive.

They were all fate.

The faithful could not help but feel reverence for them.

Holy Maiden Peak was the true successor to the Orthodoxy's southern faction and was naturally no exception.

Xu Yourong had received these teachings since she was a child and these beliefs had long since sunken into her bones. She could not be like Wang Zhice and Chen Changsheng and say 'I don't believe in fate'.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets said that Chen Changsheng's illness had no cure, that it was fate.

She lowered her head, her eyelashes softly trembling.

"I want to bring him back to the capital. The Empress and His Holiness are both there—they can cure him."



"No person can cure him."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets looked at her and said with a grave expression, "The Empress can defy the heavens and change fate, but can you?"

After a moment of silence, Xu Yourong replied, "Perhaps I can't, but I want to try."

She believed and revered fate, and was perhaps even willing to calmly accept any sort of fate that was granted to her, whether good or bad.

But she could not accept the tragedy and unfairness that fate had thrown upon Chen Changsheng.

She released Chen Changsheng's hand and gently placed hers on Chen Changsheng's forehead.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets knew what she wanted to do and warned, "Do not use the Sacred Light technique, that will only worsen his injuries."

Xu Yourong did not respond, nor did she seem to have any intention of moving her hand.

The elder's voice grew somewhat colder. "You do not believe me?"

Xu Yourong indifferently replied, "Yes."

After a moment of silence, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets asked, "Why?"

Xu Yourong raised her head to look at him and calmly replied, "Because you did not act."

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets had just admitted that he had known of the problem with Chen Changsheng's meridians, which meant he had already prepared for this matter.

When Guan Bai's Heavenly Dao Sword descended, he was the only person that could reasonably change the final result.

But he had done nothing, remaining seated on his high platform.

Xu Yourong calmly stared at the Elder of Heavenly Secrets.

In both seniority and cultivation, she was very lacking when compared to the leader of the Storms of the Eight Directions.

But she was the Holy Maiden of the south, representing one of the most powerful factions of the Orthodoxy.

Her calm had a sort of majesty, her questions had an edge. "Do you not really wish for him to die?"

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets turned to the unconscious Chen Changsheng on the bed. After a few moments of silence, he said, "I already told him that if he continued to cultivate, problems would definitely occur, but he did not listen, so he will become a problem for the Empress. If you let him continue to live, then who will resolve this problem for the Empress in the future?"

He had not directly answered Xu Yourong's question, but he had already tacitly admitted it.

Xu Yourong stared into his eyes and asked, "What does his problem have to do with the Empress?"

"I am called Heavenly Secrets, but even if I exhaust my mind, I can only pry into one or two of them. I know the external reason, but I do not know its cause or motives."

After saying this, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets held his hands behind him and walked out of the house.

As a member of the same generation as the Demon Lord, the oldest expert of the Divine Domain on the continent, he truly was very old. Even his back was somewhat stooped.

In truth, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets enjoyed speaking with young people. He had been willing to support the Divine Empress in the past for the same reason. He very much liked Xu Yourong and Chen Changsheng. He had originally intended to explain to Xu Yourong that he had attempted to imprison the Demon Lord in

Mount Han with the Heavenstone array, and when the Demon Lord ultimately broke through, he had suffered heavy injuries.

But in the end, he had said nothing.

Because his being heavily injured was a fact, and his wanting Chen Changsheng to die was similarly also a fact.

Seeing the Elder of Heavenly Secrets depart, Xu Yourong's mind finally relaxed somewhat. Her appearance which had previously been sharp as a sword finally returned to gentle tranquility.

It was just then that Ye Xiaolian, female disciple of South Stream Temple, arrived outside the hall and prostrated herself in front of the door. "Temple Master, there is a matter to urgently report."

# Chapter 596 - I Will Fight This Battle For Him (III)

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"What matter?" Xu Yourong did not raise her head or even blink her eyelashes.

"A person wants to break in. It's...a person of the Orthodox Academy," Ye Xiaolian replied uneasily.

Xu Yourong was keenly aware that the person that dared to rush the sword array of South Stream Temple and also wanted to see Chen Changsheng could only be Zhexiu. She impassively responded, "Chop off his legs."

Ye Xiaolian asked, "What of the two archbishops?"

This was speaking of Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang. As Prefects of the Orthodoxy, even South Stream Temple had to pay them due respect.

Xu Yourong did not reply because she had already given her orders.

She only calmly gazed at the couch-ridden Chen Changsheng.

Ye Xiaolian gazed at the distant beautiful figure from outside the door, mentally quite surprised.

Her talent was not bad and when she was very small, she entered Gentle Stream Monastery to begin cultivating.

Gentle Stream Monastery was very close to the sword training grounds of Mount Li. When she was small, she would often see Qiushan Jun practicing his sword there. Like all the other female children, she very naturally became one of Qiushan Jun's ardent followers, which is why she had spoken so rudely to Chen Changsheng on the Li Palace's Divine Avenue, only to be scolded so harshly by Tang Thirty-Six that she wept bitter tears in an extremely pitiable display.

Later on, many things happened. She had gone to the Garden of Zhou and the objects of her worship and respect...now included a person called Chen Changsheng.

Perhaps for this reason, she had always concealed a little jealousy towards Xu Yourong, but because their positions were too different, she could not voice her complaints.

In the spring after the conclusion of that year's Grand Examination, she moved from Gentle Stream Monastery to South Stream Temple and was even less prone to revealing such emotions before Xu Yourong. With the passing of time, the jealousy that she had concealed deep within her heart had vanished without a trace. In the end, her target of worship and respect had even moved from Qiushan Jun and Chen Changsheng to Xu Yourong.

Just like the common people of the capital and her senior sisters of South Stream Temple.

Now, seeing Xu Yourong sitting by the couch, she felt her to be high and noble.

If Mo Yu were present and heard Xu Yourong's command, saw her figure, she would definitely feel that she was growing more and more similar to the Divine Empress.

Not long after Ye Xiaolian's departure, the noise outside the hall gradually grew silent.

Xu Yourong quietly stared at Chen Changsheng, realizing that from time to time, he would frown his brow. It seemed that even while unconscious, he could still feel an inexhaustible pain.

Her medical arts could not be compared to Chen Changsheng's, but they were quite good. After gripping Chen Changsheng's hand for so long and silently feeling his pulse, she had affirmed that the Elder of Heavenly Secrets's conclusion was correct.

His meridians were all severed, so how could it be treated?

She turned her head to the pitch-black darkness beyond the window. The lack of the many stars made her understand that there were clouds tonight.

After confirming that there was no one outside the building spying in, she turned her head and unfastened Chen Changsheng's clothes.

His tattered Daoist robe was thrown on the floor and his underpants were also taken off.

In this entire course of events, her fingers were very steady, her movements very straightforward. There was no hesitation and no shyness on her pale and beautiful face.

Chen Changsheng's skin was very smooth, seeming just like an infant's, breakable by the slightest gust of wind. Representing the fact that he had undergone the most perfect of Purifications, even after engaging in such an intense battle and receiving such severe internal injuries, the surface of his skin was without blemish, with not even the smallest wound present. It looked just like the colored porcelain popular in Xuelao City, painted over with a faint layer of pink.

This sort of skin was perhaps the dream of all young girls, but Xu Yourong's expression became particularly grave.

Because that layer of pink was not because his skin was tender, but because blood was seeping out right below Chen Changsheng's skin.

The blood seeping out of the severed meridians was now slowly permeating through his body. At any moment, it could contaminate the surface of his body or flow out of his eyes and nose.

This blood was not any ordinary blood, but his true blood, every



drop containing a part of his divine soul.

Xu Yourong thought of what Chen Changsheng had told her in the Mausoleum of Zhou and her expression grew even graver, her face paler, a tinge of apprehension finally emerging in her clear and bright eyes.

This was the matter Chen Changsheng had been most concerned about for his entire life, and also what she was most concerned about at this very moment.

A moment ago, she had intentionally questioned the intentions of the Elder of Heavenly Secrets, not even hesitating to treat him with hostility, precisely so that she could intentionally have the Elder of Heavenly Secrets depart this house.

In the capital, Chen Changsheng had once told her that the blood he bled right now no longer contained that most terrifying smell, but it was obvious that circumstances had changed.

Perhaps it was precisely that moment when he successfully broke through and guided the boundless radiance of the stars into his body.

She had no means of confirming whether her deductions were correct or not, but she could not risk it; she could not allow the blood within Chen Changsheng's body to flow out.

A faint light imbued with a sacred intention fell from her palm

and covered Chen Changsheng's body.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets had warned her that now that all of Chen Changsheng's meridians were severed, the slightest strength, even the Sacred Light, entering these meridians would only cause him to bear an even greater burden and only worsen his injuries.

But she still used the Sacred Light technique without hesitation, not because she had no faith whatsoever in the Elder of Heavenly Secrets's words, but because this Sacred Light was somewhat different.

The clear light fell on Chen Changsheng's body but did not enter it. Instead, it paused in the air, extremely close to his body, separated by not even one-tenth the thickness of a strand of hair.

Xu Yourong's palm slowly moved and the clear light followed, slowly wrapping Chen Changsheng's body within, not leaving the smallest gap.

This sort of skill required an extremely firm control and an extremely composed, stable and powerful spiritual sense. Very few people in the world could accomplish it.

Xu Yourong's Dao heart was brightly lit, yet after displaying this Sacred Light technique, even her face paled significantly.

The faint layer of pink on Chen Changsheng's body grew even

fainter after being wrapped in that thin layer of Sacred Light.

Even if the scent of his true blood exuded from his pores, it would still be completely isolated by the Sacred Light.

Upon confirming that the problem had been momentarily resolved, Xu Yourong's expression finally relaxed.

The wind off the lake blew in from the window, tousling the hair on her temples, causing it to catch on the fragrant sweat on her powdered cheeks. She looked very beautiful.

With the gusting of the wind in Mount Han, the clouds in the night sky instantly dispersed. Silver light descended and the pine forest became a sea of silver, a beautiful sight.

Perhaps because they had smelled something or were frightened by the sudden descent of the starlight, the beasts in the mountain forests howled to the sky of multitudinous stars with unease.

Deep within the silver sea of pines arose a rustling sound.

The tree leaves were numerous, obscuring the majority of this thing's body, but the lines that were visible were extremely graceful. Moreover, when suffused by the silver starlight, they seemed exceptionally pure and holy.

An eye appeared amongst the dense leaves, brimming with intelligence and serenity. But when this eye turned to the house by

the lake, it revealed a tinge of frustration.

It had clearly smelled that scent, been willing to travel a thousand li, disregarded those repulsive straight-backed monkeys on the lake shore...so why had that scent disappeared?

After a long time passed, it finally gave up and turned back into the sea of pines, borrowing the trees to completely hide its tracks and body.

In the sky filled with starlight, only a silver-colored horn could be faintly seen bobbing in and out of the leaves.

The beasts of Mount Han, due to some indescribable agitation, howled towards the starry sky.

The fish within the Heaven Lake were also taken by an indescribable excitement, swimming back and forth in the waters by the house.

Several hundred small black fish surrounded the date pit in the fine sand of the shallows, incessantly pecking at it, even kissing it, pushing that date pit farther and farther away until it vanished into the depths of the lake.

Xu Yourong took out the cloth bag from her sleeve, took a candied date and threw it into her mouth, and began to suck on it.

Very sweet.

At these moments, sugar could assist one in calming the mind. And she liked eating sweet things. The first time she was brought to Holy Maiden Peak, she had still been very small. When her teacher the Holy Maiden had asked her how one could maintain the unity of the Dao heart, she looked behind her teacher at the box of candied dates on the table and twisted her small body as she shyly answered, "Only candied dates can."

When she thought of her childhood as she sucked on the candied date, she began to laugh.

Then she also remembered that a few nights ago, she was sitting next to Chen Changsheng on the lake shore and had also been eating a candied date, but how had she been able to safeguard her Dao heart...her mind became a tad disordered.

But it was still very sweet.

She turned to Chen Changsheng on the couch, thinking, although he's not as handsome as Senior Brother, he's still rather handsome. I can look at him, and he has more of a lingering charm.

Though asleep, Chen Changsheng still pursed his lips and creased his brow, seeming to be in deep pain.

Xu Yourong caressed his forehead. Her fingertip fell on his lips, lightly pricking it like a dragonfly before returning.

"I will not let you die," she said to him.

Because she was sucking on the candied date, her voice was somewhat indistinct, yet extremely clear.

By blocking off the scent of Chen Changsheng's blood, she had only addressed the first problem. Next, she would have to resolve an even more troublesome problem.

If he continued to lose blood in this way, even if the blood was being lost in his internal organs, he would still die from excessive blood loss.

How to staunch the bleeding? This was a very troublesome problem, as his body could no longer bear the Sacred Light technique.

And even if the bleeding were staunched, how to supplement his blood? This was also a very troublesome problem. He had clearly lost too much blood, so the mechanisms of his body could not be counted on to replenish his blood.

Any other person would be powerless to resolve these problems. Just as the Elder of Heavenly Secrets had said, and just as what was faintly expressed in Guan Bai's strike, the Heavenly Dao could not be defied.

In the end, could the Heavenly Dao really not be defied?

Xu Yourong wished to fight a battle against the Heavenly Dao, just like she had blocked that sword for him.

She had faith.

Because he had taught her when he had saved her back then.

She took out the Tong Bow and then directed the forefinger of her right hand to lightly scratch the wrist of her left.

A line of blood appeared on her jade-like wrist and then gradually began to expand, spilling out more and more blood.

The true blood of the Heavenly Phoenix blazed when struck by the wind, emitting countless rays of light, illuminating her appearance clearly, a beauty beyond compare.

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# Chapter 597 - Several Thousand Wildfires

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The Tong Palace was a bow, Xu Yourong's most powerful tool, and simultaneously the spatial artifact of Holy Maiden Peak. From a certain perspective, it was precisely like the Stainless Sword and Chen Changsheng.

At this moment, the Tong Palace was placed vertically over Chen Changsheng's chest, Xu Yourong's gaze attentively gazing at the place where they touched. With the light pluck of her finger, the bowstring vibrated with unimaginable speed, transforming into a blur of images simply impossible to catch with the naked eye, followed by a hum like the sound of a zither.

Chen Changsheng had bathed in Dragon blood, granting him a body comparable to that obtained from a perfect Purification. Ordinary weapons would find it impossible to breach his skin, but now, with the vibration of the bowstring, a tiny wound gradually opened up on his chest. This was most likely the principle of 'that which has no substance can penetrate the solid'.

Of course, Xu Yourong would not allow his blood to flow out from that wound. With a light wave of her left hand, clear light spilled down and cut off the wound from the outside world. At the same time, with a thought, the true blood of the Heavenly Phoenix that was currently blazing on her wrist was extinguished, and any sense of that majestic strength vanished, making it seem just like water.

Her blood slowly flowed down the smooth surface of the bow. With the natural suction of the spatial artifact, the blood became



an extremely thin line that entered Chen Changsheng's body through that wound.

After a long time had passed, she stopped and closed up Chen Changsheng's wound as quickly as possible. Her face was pale and she was very feeble, perhaps because she had lost too much blood.

However, she did not rest, because the treatment had not concluded. Raising her right hand, using the sleeve to wipe the sweat off her forehead, she gripped Chen Changsheng's hand, closed her eyes, and began to move her mind.

Relying on that inseverable and close connection between her and the Heavenly Phoenix true blood, her mind entered Chen Changsheng's body without any sort of obstruction. Carried along by the Heavenly Phoenix true blood, her thought traveled freely through his body, seeing those severed meridians and even bleaker sights.

Endless amounts of blood were incessantly flowing out of the fractures in his meridians and out of his body. In the space between his internal organs was his true blood, his soul contained within. For some reason, this true blood contained a seemingly infinite Qi of life. Although she did not truly sense, only saw it through her spiritual sense, although she was willing to offer her life to him, in that tiny instant, she sensed her spiritual world shuddering as she was overtaken by a fierce desire to plunder that Qi away.

Xu Yourong closed her eyes, her eyelashes trembling and her face paling even more. Thankfully, the candied date she was sucking on

soaked into her body and allowed her to safeguard her Dao heart, so no problems arose.

At this moment, the Heavenly Phoenix true blood had already dispersed to every part of Chen Changsheng's body. The seventy-two meridians, the three hundred and sixty-five Qi openings, and even the tiniest place, like the roots of pores—the blood was present everywhere.

This was the time.

With a flash of her thoughts, the Heavenly Phoenix true blood attached to those several meridians almost simultaneously began to blaze, several thousand tiny flames erupting within Chen Changsheng's body!

A second later, all the flames had been extinguished.

Other than a dull charred smell, there was no evidence to indicate just what had occurred.

She had placed a fire in Chen Changsheng's body and ignited a plain.

She had converted the Heavenly Phoenix true blood into the tiniest of particles and cauterized the fractures in those meridians, thus staunching the bleeding without harming the extremely thin walls of his meridians.

Xu Yourong opened her eyes and gazed at Chen Changsheng on the couch. After verifying that his injuries were finally under control, she finally relaxed. His seventy-two meridians had been bleeding from several thousand places, and now they had all been cauterized shut. He was no longer losing blood. At the very least, she did not have to worry that he would not be able to last the night.

The Elder of Heavenly Secrets had judged that Chen Changsheng would not be able to survive precisely because an injury like his meridians being all ruptured could not be cured, especially when the Sacred Light technique could not be used. Who could have imagined that Xu Yourong would produce such a wild idea and display such a miraculous technique?

She had sent her Heavenly Phoenix true blood into Chen Changsheng's body. Not merely had this halted his internal bleeding, it also accomplished a similarly important goal: supplementing his blood.

There was no doctor at present that could choose this sort of method for supplementing blood. This was because blood was different from human to human, and different types of blood would conflict within a person's body and cause them to die even faster.

The Heavenly Phoenix true blood was naturally precious, but not everyone could bear it, because it had always been one of the world's most tyrannical true bloods. Even when she had used her mind to restrain all of its strength, the Qi it exuded on its own was still excessively tyrannical. More importantly, her blood had

always been different from the other people of the world.

Chen Changsheng's blood was also different from the rest of the people in the world. His blood was the purest, containing the boundless energy of life, which was why in the Garden of Zhou, he was able to supplement Xu Yourong's blood. At present, Xu Yourong's blood had long since melded with his blood, so she could naturally supplement his blood.

Back then, he had persisted in saving her, and now, only she could save him. The reason was just that simple.

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Zhexiu's legs had not been chopped off by the female disciples, nor had the miserable sight of rivers of blood appeared in front of the house. The reason was also very simple: Tang Thirty-Six was by his side.

"Nothing will happen to him, you don't need to worry," he said to Zhexiu.

Zhexiu looked at him expressionlessly and said, "You trust so much in Xu Yourong?"

Tang Thirty-Six replied, "Even if the entire world wants to harm him, she will not."

Zhexiu did not understand.

The entire world, or everyone in Mount Han at any rate, did not understand.

When the Elder of Heavenly Secrets had departed a while ago, he had not said too much, just that the Holy Maiden was looking after Chen Changsheng. Upon hearing this, the crowd was even more shocked and confused.

What sort of status did Xu Yourong have? Her previous action of risking her life to save Chen Changsheng was already incomprehensible enough, but now she was personally looking after him? If she was still Chen Changsheng's fiancée, this matter would actually make some sense, but hadn't that engagement long been annulled? Wasn't it said that she loathed him?

The disciples of Mount Li all had peculiar expressions while Gou Hanshi had a pensive look. Guan Feibai finally could not hold himself back and whispered, "No wonder Eldest Brother wants to stay far, far away."

The night clouds had already dispersed and starlight illuminated the lake. It was quiet with everyone harboring their own thoughts. After quite some time had passed, the sound of a door opening could be heard as Xu Yourong walked out from the house.

The crowd surged forward like a tide.

The South Stream Temple sword array dispersed, yet it still guarded the area in front of Xu Yourong.

No one dared to voluntarily ask. Xu Yourong looked at Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu and said, "He is still not awake. You two look after him. I have to rest a while."

The crowd noted that her face was deathly pale and she seemed utterly exhausted.

Linghai Zhiwang said, "I will see Principal Chen first."

Xu Yourong shook her head, calmly but firmly.

Linghai Zhiwang slightly creased his brow, confused and also secretly rather angry. He thought that the two of them were on the same side and that he should have taken the lead in this matter, yet he had unexpectedly been rejected.

"What he needs the most right now is rest. Other things can be discussed tomorrow."

After saying this, she was escorted away by the disciples of South Stream Temple.

Not all disciples left with her. Several dozen South Stream Temple disciples remained outside the house, the sword array once

more obstructing all, with only Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu being permitted inside.

The crowd outside the house gradually dispersed. They believed that Chen Changsheng had encountered some problem when breaking into Star Condensation, and with the Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets and the master of the Sacred Light technique that was the Holy Maiden personally acting, there would naturally not be any major difficulties. Not a single person could have imagined that tonight, without Xu Yourong, Chen Changsheng would perhaps already be dead.

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At five o'clock in the early morning, Chen Changsheng woke up.

He knew that it was five in the morning because, in these countless days, he had always woken up at this time. As a result, he momentarily forgot about what had happened yesterday and prepared to get out of bed.

Then he realized that he wasn't wearing anything.

Then he realized that Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu were by his bed, staring at him.

This made him feel extremely uncomfortable.

Only now did he recall what had happened yesterday and his expression subtly shifted.

Tang Thirty-Six saw that he had woken up and his expression slightly relaxed. Yet he had no intention of speaking to Chen Changsheng yet, instead turning around to head out of the house, saying, "I'll go notify South Stream Temple."

Chen Changsheng said, "Don't. She doesn't want anyone else to know of our relationship."

As he spoke, he subconsciously glanced at Zhexiu, thinking, Tang Thirty-Six previously did not hide it from Zhexiu; could it be that when I fell unconscious yesterday, Tang Thirty-Six told everything?

"The entire world knows now."

Tang Thirty-Six unhappily replied, then continued out of the house.

Chen Changsheng turned to Zhexiu.

Zhexiu said indifferently, "I also know."

Chen Changsheng froze, thinking, just what happened while I was unconscious?



# Chapter 598 - Before Life And Death, A Conversation About Passion And Love

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Amongst the members of the Orthodox Academy, Zhexiu's cultivation level was not the highest, but he was undoubtedly the strongest in fighting. In a battle of life-or-death, even Chen Changsheng was not his match. This was because of his incomparably rich battle experience and his frightening will tempered from walking between life and death. However, in matters of love, he had not the slightest experience, much less any perception for it.

"Doesn't she loathe you?" he directly voiced the doubts in his mind.

Chen Changsheng laughed, not knowing how to respond to this question, but when he laughed, he smelled the faint scent of rust coming from his throat. It was the scent of blood. His expression flickered and his spiritual sense moved as he entered meditative introspection. He then plunged into a long silence, his face very pale.

So it turned out...that this was what was going on. Could it be that his maximum limit of twenty years old had come in advance?

He could clearly sense that all the meridians of his body had already ruptured once, but for some reason, the several thousand wounds in his meridians had all been cauterized shut and were no longer bleeding. Soon after, he understood why, because he could clearly feel her blood moving through his body.

The limpid and slightly chilly waters of the lake slowly flowed around the wooden pillars of the house as footsteps could be heard. Xu Yourong and Tang Thirty-Six walked into the house. Tang Thirty-Six indicated that he and Zhexiu should go, leaving only Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong inside. The lake waters continued to slowly flow below the house, but the small black fish were no longer as excited. However, that date pit had disappeared.

Chen Changsheng and Xu Yourong quietly looked into each other's eyes, neither speaking for a very long time. The house was very still, even somewhat desolate. He thought to himself, as the man, there are still some things that should be for me to say. Licking his somewhat dry lips, he said seriously to her, "Sorry."

This simple 'sorry' had many meanings, like how he had concealed his illness, how his fate was not good and he was troubling her, how it was impossible for them to continue being together.

Xu Yourong calmly looked into his eyes as she said, "On that night, was this the secret that you wanted to tell me?"

"Yes, my body has been unhealthy since I was a child. After the age of ten, when my soul began seeping out of my severed meridians, Master judged that I would not live past the age of twenty, but..."

After a moment of silence, Chen Changsheng continued, "I thought that no matter what, I would still be able to live until

twenty, that I still had three years of time. I believed that I really did have a chance to change my fate. I wanted to try first and then consider my options, but I didn't imagine that, in the end, the age of twenty would come in advance."

Xu Yourong asked, "And then?"

Chen Changsheng gazed at her snow-white face and could imagine just how much heart blood she had paid to save him, real heart blood. He softly said once more, "Sorry."

Xu Yourong held her hands behind her and walked to the window, gazing at the profuse stars in the night sky. A few moments of silence passed before she spoke, "At the time, you wanted to tell, but I didn't want to hear, so there's no need for you to apologize."

For a long time, Chen Changsheng did not reply. Finally, he said, "Fortunately, the engagement was already annulled."

"Or else I would have become a widow?" Xu Yourong did not turn her head and her voice grew icier.

Chen Changsheng could sense what she was feeling. He was somewhat moved, somewhat comforted, but even more anxious. He said to her back, "I will die."

Xu Yourong's voice continued to grow colder, bordering on apathetic. "And then?"

Chen Changsheng replied, "Zhexiu's illness has a chance of being cured, but this illness of mine really cannot be cured."

Xu Yourong's reply was still those two words, "And then?"

Chen Changsheng continued, "Senior Su Li is so unrestrained and open-minded, but not even he would agree to marrying off his daughter to Zhexiu, so how could your parents agree to marry you off to me?"

Xu Yourong replied, "I do not require the orders of my parents and my teacher is also far away. My marriage is my own matter."

Chen Changsheng argued, "And the Empress? She so dotes on you, cares for you—could it be that you don't need to heed her opinion?"

Xu Yourong's voice was very calm. "My affairs have never heeded the opinions of anyone else, and if you really are Crown Prince Zhaoming, then whether you're ill or not, even on the verge of death, you would still [be blessed to live ten thousand years](#) and the Empress would never agree to me being married off to you, so this question of yours has no meaning."

(TN: Wishing someone to live ten thousand years is a phrase usually reserved for wishing the emperor a long life, here being used to indicate that Chen Changsheng is a member of the Chen Imperial clan and that the Empress would not permit a marriage with someone associated with her enemies.)

The starlight fell upon the lake and was reflected off its surface, falling on the house in a sheet of silver, outlining her body in silver as well. She was strikingly beautiful, as if at any moment, she could ride the wind and depart.

Gazing at her figure, Chen Changsheng felt like it was getting further and further away. He softly asked, "Then what about me?"

Xu Yourong turned to him, her dress rising in the wind, her voice as chilly as the wind. "And what about you?"

Chen Changsheng looked into her eyes with no intention of backing down. "I will not let you marry a person about to die, and I don't want you to tell the world about our relationship. Our engagement is already annulled and as long as we don't admit it, then after I die, no matter who you marry, it will be much easier, like...Qiushan Jun."

After awakening and confirming that his meridians were all ruptured, that his chance of living was nil, that his future days were scarce, he began to consider a few problems. This was his true opinion, his own decision. He thought that he would be able to very calmly accept all of this, yet when he spoke about how, in the future, she should marry Qiushan Jun, for some inexplicable reason, a feeling of bitter sorrow appeared in his heart.

Xu Yourong quietly stared at him, not speaking for a very long time. Just when Chen Changsheng thought that she would depart with a flick of her sleeve, she suddenly said, "Just like you say, the engagement between us had already been annulled, so there's no relationship between the two of us. This being the case, what right

do you have to speak with the tone of a fiancé and discuss what I will do after your death?"

Chen Changsheng did not know how to respond because everything she said was correct.

"But I really will die, and I will die very soon."

"Every person will die—Emperor Taizong and Zhou Dufu also died. This is a common affair."

"I'm just worried about you."

"Relax, while you are still alive, I would die for you, just like you would die for me."

This was the most passionate of romantic phrases, the most sincere confession of love, but Xu Yourong had spoken so calmly and indifferently, like she was speaking of a most simple and plain principle. Water will flow downhill, the sun will set and not rise again, every person will die, and we are lovers walking the same path, naturally able to offer our lives for each other.

If this were anyone else, they would assuredly be rendered stunned and speechless by the contrast between these words of passion and the mood they were spoken with. However, Chen Changsheng also possessed an extremely unique personality and did not feel that any of this was inappropriate. On the contrary, he felt that this was the her that he loved so much. He was a similar

sort of person and so regardless of whether confronting life and death or love, he would cast his emotions into the deepest part of his body, confronting and handling these matters with a calm attitude.

"...But I will not live for you. While you are still alive, I will live my own life. If you die, I will similarly live well."

Xu Yourong looked into his eyes and said, "But first, you must struggle to live and I will also struggle for your survival. I do not want you to die."

This conversation before life and death about passion and love came to an end.

She had very calmly obtained the final victory in this debate.

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# Chapter 599 - Let Us Meet Again, Swift Carriage

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Before leaving, Xu Yourong said to Chen Changsheng, "Prepare for an immediate return to the capital. I am confident that there is somebody in this world that can cure you."

In the slight warmth of the dawn light, Gou Hanshi and the other disciples of Mount Li once more came to the house, inquiring if they could visit.

The Mount Li Sword Sect had always had a close relationship with Holy Maiden Peak, and the previous Holy Maiden was at this moment traveling with Su Li in another world. Perhaps for this reason—and also perhaps because they were about to return to the capital and there was a high chance that Chen Changsheng would have no further opportunity to meet Gou Hanshi and the others again—Xu Yourong did not deny their request.

Leaning on the couch and covered in a silk blanket, Chen Changsheng laughed as he saw Gou Hanshi and the other two disciples walk in.

Gou Hanshi asked, "Is it a problem from breaking through?"

Chen Changsheng first nodded but then shook his head.

Impatient, Guan Feibai asked, "Is that it or not?"



Chen Changsheng explained, "There really were some problems that appeared as I was breaking through. They weren't serious, only somewhat troublesome. Ultimately, however, they weren't the root cause."

Gou Hanshi asked, "Then what was the cause?"

Chen Changsheng glanced at Guan Feibai and said, "All of you said in the past that my fate was good. In fact, my fate is truly bad. I have an illness."

Guan Feibai said unhappily, "If you have an illness, cure it. Is there any need to act so pathetically in front of us?"

Only the Elder of Heavenly Secrets and Xu Yourong knew the specifics of the situation, with not even Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu being able to guess at the details. The cultivators that had come to participate in the Boiling Stone Summit by the Heaven Lake of Mount Han all believed that Chen Changsheng had encountered some minor problems as he broke into Star Condensation, and Gou Hanshi and the others were the same. Who could have imagined, who would dare think, that his life was already running short?

Chen Changsheng laughed and said, "That makes sense, which is why, in a little while, I'll be leaving, returning to the capital to cure my illness."

"Will there be any difficulties?" Gou Hanshi asked as he looked at Chen Changsheng's eyes.

Chen Changsheng shook his head. "It's just that the journey is rather long; how could there be any difficulties?"

Guan Feibai and Liang Banhu thought, that's true—although Chen Changsheng is still quite young, he's already been designated as the Orthodoxy's successor. With the confluence of the north and south completed, the Great Zhou Dynasty is at its peak, and the Orthodoxy has millions upon millions of believers in this world. And there's also Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang, two Prefects of the Orthodoxy, at his side for this journey, so there's no way there could be any troubles.

At this moment, a South Stream Temple disciple entered to report that the carriage was ready and that the Holy Maiden would like to know when they should depart.

Guan Feibai had speculated for an entire night and could no longer restrain himself. Looking at Chen Changsheng, he asked, "You and Junior Sister Xu...no, with the Holy Maiden, just what's going on between the two of you?"

Chen Changsheng thought it over but didn't know how to explain, so he decided it was better to just not speak.

Thankfully, Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu had already finished packing the luggage and the disciples of South Stream Temple had also come over to meet them. As a result, this question was lost in the confusion.

Tang Thirty-Six prepared to help Chen Changsheng up but was prevented from doing so by South Stream Temple disciple Ye Xiaolian.

Ye Xiaolian calmly and seriously explained, "The Holy Maiden has decreed that unless ordered, no one can touch Little Principal Chen."

Flustered, Tang Thirty-Six said, "If I didn't know about those irritating matters, do you think I would be able to restrain myself?"

Ye Xiaolian did not care about what those irritating matters he was speaking of were. She walked straight to the couch and very cautiously helped Chen Changsheng get up, supporting him all the way until he was seated in the carriage.

Before the carriage had begun to move, sword intent rose up with the morning wind.

Guan Bai stood on the stone platform and said to Chen Changsheng in the carriage, "My apologies, this sort of conclusion was not my intention."

Chen Changsheng replied, "It has nothing to do with Senior, it's purely my own problem."

Guan Bai replied, "But in the end, it still appeared because of me. You are the future of the Orthodoxy, countless times more

important than me. If I really have affected the ability of humans to resist the demons, then even if I were to die ten thousand times, it would not be enough to redeem me."

Chen Changsheng said, "I hear that Senior has spent these past few years as an expert amongst the ranks of the Demon-resisting Army of the North. It's truly admirable and I hoped that I would have the chance to fight alongside you, but..."

Upon saying this, he finally became somewhat depressed.

He still had many things he had not done, many places he had not visited. Although he had gone to the snowy plains of the demon lands before, he had not done anything to help the soldiers there yet.

Guan Bai naturally did not understand the true meaning behind these words. "There will come an opportunity someday. In the future, let us meet again on the snowy plains."

Chen Changsheng nodded, saying, "See you there."

Gou Hanshi and the others also halted their footsteps and bid him farewell.

Chen Changsheng gazed at them, his expression calm, yet his mood growing more and more downcast. He thought to himself, it's truly a high possibility that I will never see any of you again.

Under a pine tree and watching the convoy gradually vanish down the mountain path, Gou Hanshi's expression grew solemn.

Guan Feibai was somewhat confused. "No matter how serious his injuries, how troublesome his illness, after returning to the capital, His Holiness will be there to personally treat him and he will naturally be cured. What need is there for Senior Brother to be so concerned?"

"Chen Changsheng studied under Principal Shang, and Principal Shang is Daoist Ji. We've also once seen his medical expertise and he could be rated as a divine physician. And Junior Sister Xu has long since cultivated her Sacred Light technique to the pinnacle. If the two of them could not treat his illness, is there anyone that can? Even if His Holiness really could, why does Junior Sister Xu also have to accompany him back to the capital?"

Gou Hanshi spoke while at the same time organizing his own analysis. He felt more and more that something was wrong and his expression turned even graver, even somewhat grim.

Upon hearing these words, Guan Feibai came to his senses. Turning towards the end of the mountain path and listening to the faint sound of hooves, he somewhat anxiously asked, "What do we do? Do you want to catch up and ask?"

Gou Hanshi replied, "Since he doesn't want to say, what need is there to ask?"

The convoy swiftly advanced south, trampling over countless

leaves and fruits on the way. The mountain path was covered in carriage tracks as well as crushed fruits and leaves.

Chen Changsheng was not in the Orthodoxy's carriage, but the imperial carriage of Holy Maiden Peak. The South Stream Temple disciples attended upon him, ready at any time to form a sword array. The curtains could not keep out those suspicious and curious gazes, but their swords could prevent those gazes from disturbing the person within.

Just as in the house by the lake, the Holy Maiden had ordered that it was strictly prohibited for anyone to touch Chen Changsheng.

Based on principle, although Xu Yourong was the Holy Maiden of the south with an exceptionally noble and lofty status, Chen Changsheng was still the future Pope, so there was no reason for the Orthodoxy's people to accept this arrangement. But perhaps because of that engagement that once existed or because Holy Maiden Peak's display had been too unyielding, Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang had still not made any objections.

Of course, the most important reason was that Chen Changsheng himself had not opposed this plan. Tang Thirty-Six knew their secrets, so he would also naturally not offer any dissent, while Zhexiu still did not completely understand what was going on.

The five hundred li of Mount Han was quickly left behind under the convoy's furious charge. After passing through the mountain gate bearing the words 'Pavilion of Heavenly Secrets', it very quickly arrived at the village below the mountain. The believers of

the village kneeled like the tide on both sides of the road, and even people in the fields seemed to kneel down, yet they were unable to make the carriages carrying the Holy Maiden and the future Pope pause for even the shortest time. Ultimately, they could only see the dust and the faintly visible carriages within.

The blizzards and harsh cold of the snowy plains were blocked off by Mount Han and the plains of the north in the beginning of autumn could still be described as verdant. Nearby, one could see many fruits and newly tied bean vines, but if one were to look further, the green that signified life would swiftly fade, gradually growing more desolate as it mixed with the sandstorms on the horizon, looking just like the wastelands on which the humans and demons had primarily fought their battles.

The curtains flew up and down as the wind from the front poured in, yet it could not touch his face. Chen Changsheng knew that this imperial carriage had some sort of array. Only in this way could it match with the Holy Maiden's identity and status, but he still felt that it was overly extravagant. He wanted to say something, but he felt it inappropriate, and when he saw the vast sight in the distance, his thoughts turned elsewhere.

He gazed at the plains that seemed to contain countless cavalry and said, "Yesterday, Heavenly Secrets coldly watched as I was about to die, then...many people loyal to the Empress also want me to die, right?"

The army of the Great Zhou Imperial Court was completely under the command of the thirty-eight Divine Generals, and besides Han Qing who stood guard over the Mausoleum of Books,

all the other Divine Generals were like Xue Xingchuan and Xu Shiji, absolutely loyal to the Divine Empress.

In the long journey from Mount Han to the capital, they would have to pass through many passes and strategic towns. If the two sides really did have a falling-out, then the convoy could be attacked by troops at any time. Even his return to the capital would not be all that simple.

Xu Yourong was still injured and she had not slept for nearly an entire night. She was extremely exhausted, and after leaving Mount Han, her eyes had been shut in rest. Upon hearing his sighs, she opened her eyes and glanced towards the distance, saying, "That will depend on whether Heavenly Secrets notifies the capital about your matter, who he notifies, and whether or not this news will be sent to the offices of those Divine Generals before we reach the capital. And I still don't understand—even if your survival will affect the Empress somehow, why would your existence affect her?"

Chen Changsheng looked around. He saw that in the flying curtains were nothing but the figures of South Stream Temple disciples. Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu were riding horses about twenty zhang in front, but Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang, leading the Orthodoxy's forces, were very far behind them. Moreover, this array was probably able to block the probing of spiritual sense.

"You should have heard about that rumor that the Empress defied the heavens and changed fate," he said to Xu Yourong.



Xu Yourong faintly guessed at what he wanted to say. Perking her brows, she asked, "Could it be that you also believe that nonsense gossiped about by the ignorant in markets and countryside?"

Chen Changsheng looked into her eyes and said, "I read Wang Zhice's notebook in the Lingyan Pavilion."

This was a secret imparted to him by his teacher that he had never told anyone else before, but he had never planned to hide it from Xu Yourong. His blood flowed in her body, her blood flowed in his. There was no better example than this of the so-called mingling of blood and thus trusting in one another.

After a very long time, he concluded his narrative.

Xu Yourong looked at him and said, "You understand what I mean. Even if the Empress really did change her fate back then, it can't be according to the rumors gossiped about in the marketplace."

The Divine Empress had been de facto ruler of the human world for more than two hundred years. Although her performance in warring against the demons was unsatisfactory and she treated her opposition with excessively cruel methods, her governance of the common people could be described as perfect, with not even her opponents able to make too much of a fuss about it. But even now, complaints were sent at her from both inside and outside the Imperial Court, and she was still unable to obtain the heartfelt love and respect of even the most simple and provincial peasant. The primary contributor of this was those wicked legends surrounding her, such as the most famous one.

It was rumored that the Divine Empress, in order to defy the heavens and change fate to become the world's first female emperor, had offered up all her future children to the starry sky. To succeed, she had even personally choked her first son to death, and even successfully framed the then-empress...

"I also find it impossible to imagine such a terrifying matter, nor will I use rumors to denounce the Empress, but you should also be aware that the Empress accompanied Emperor Xian for so many years, yet they truly did not leave a single descendant behind."

Chen Changsheng continued, "The Empress perhaps did not voluntarily commit a vile deed like murdering her child, but it is highly possible that this was the price sought from her by the Heavenly Dao or a requirement for defying the heavens and changing fate."

Xu Yourong asked, "What do you want to say?"

Chen Changsheng gazed at the nearby verdant plains and the distant vast desert. After a long period of silence, he finally said, "The Empress's changing of fate...has still not succeeded."

With his voice, the world suddenly turned gloomy. Some cloud had come from nowhere and blocked off the sun. With a clap of thunder, rain began to descend from the sky.

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# Chapter 600 - Morning To Night, Together

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"I just found out that the Princess of Ping is the Empress's adopted daughter, but I would presume that many people, especially the people of the capital, long knew of this fact. As for the rest, neither the Prince of Xiang's line nor the Prince of Zhongshan's is related by blood to the Empress and she has no descendant of her own, and so these legends about her defying the heavens and changing fate started being spread around."

Chen Changsheng gazed at the beautiful rivers and mountains, calmly continuing, "But people have forgotten one very important matter. If that legend is true, then as long as Crown Prince Zhaoming is still alive, the Empress's changing of fate has not succeeded, or at the very least has not concluded."

Xu Yourong thought of the strange movements in the capital over these past few years and the case that the chief eunuch in the Imperial Palace had always been investigating in secret. Her graceful brows slightly creased as she said, "That doesn't make sense."

Chen Changsheng knew what she meant. The Divine Empress had already ruled for more than two hundred years. If her changing of fate had not succeeded, how could she have ascended to the imperial throne?

"If defying the heavens and changing fate is not an immediate event, but a long process akin to a river, then it does make sense. The Divine Empress might have a hidden danger that no one else knows about. To her, the existence of Crown Prince Zhaoming is

the greatest danger."

Chen Changsheng looked at her and said, "If I am Crown Prince Zhaoming, then my existence is the most perilous matter to the Empress, so she would naturally want to kill me."

Xu Yourong's skill in deduction was extremely strong, so she would naturally not miss out on the slightest area of doubt. She asked, "If you really are Crown Prince Zhaoming, why did Principal Shang send you off to the capital? Could it be that he was not concerned that the Divine Empress would realize your identity? He and the Pope seemed to not even attempt to conceal your identity, as if they deliberately wanted the Empress to know of your existence."

Any sort of problem could not stand against scrutiny, and even there being no problem whatsoever would stir up its own storm of questions. Chen Changsheng uncertainly said, "Because I'm much younger than Crown Prince Zhaoming, so..."

This was a very powerful reason, yet also very much like an excuse, because only the three people of Xining Village's old temple knew exactly just how old he was. He knew that it would be difficult to convince anyone with this reason, so after a moment of silence, he said, "If I'm still alive when we return to the capital, I will directly ask Martial Uncle."

Xu Yourong examined his face but detected not the slightest hint of anxiety or fear. When she thought about how he had also carried out this conversation with such composure, she thought to herself, to be able to act so calmly in the face of death, the person I

love truly is an exceptional person. Her heart moved according to her desires, and her actions moved according to her heart. She leaned on his shoulder and whispered, "You will definitely live."

A faint fragrance drifted over with her hair. Chen Changsheng gazed at her, thinking, if we could just keep leaning against each other like this, it would also be a very happy thing, but things have never proceeded according to one's desire. Once the Elder of Heavenly Secrets sends news to the capital, the Divine Empress will assuredly send someone to kill me and won't let me return to the capital alive.

Xu Yourong did not turn her head to look at his face but could still clearly sense his unease. "Unless the Empress personally moves, who can kill you?"

Mao Qiuyu and Linghai Zhiwang's carriage was behind them. Mao Qiuyu would definitely not allow Chen Changsheng to die, and while Linghai Zhiwang did wish for Chen Changsheng to die, he could not play the part of the helpless spectator under the eyes of so many. With these two peak Star Condensation Prefects of the Orthodoxy at his side, the most powerful of assassins would find it hard to approach. But Chen Changsheng was keenly aware that if the Divine Empress had decided to kill him, she would send not merely a few assassins, but an army personally commanded by a Divine General. No matter how strong Mao Qiuyu was, how could he possibly protect him?

Just as he was thinking of these things, he suddenly spotted a red flower amidst the green plains. The red flower gently swayed against those green branches, sometimes still and sometimes

moving. It seemed to have stopped on the plains, yet it never left his sight. It was actually moving forward along with the galloping carriage.

It was already long past dawn and the grasses and plants of the plains were all bereft of dew, yet the red flower was covered in dew. Under the beautiful luster of the sunlight, the splendor of the red was intimidating.

Somewhat surprised, he turned to Xu Yourong and said uncertainly, "Bie Yanghong?"

Xu Yourong nodded and gazed to that wasteland in the distance, noting, "Guan Xingke should be walking a hundred li out."

Chen Changsheng was somewhat shocked.

A few days ago when the Demon Lord had entered Mount Han, the Elder of Heavenly Secrets had notified various places in the world. Guan Xingke, who was the closest, and Bie Yanghong, who was the fastest, were the first to arrive.

Contrary to Chen Changsheng's expectations, after the Demon Lord retreated to the snowy plains, these two powerful figures not only did not depart Mount Han, but also seemed to be sending him back to the capital.

Bie Yanghong and Guan Xingke were not ordinary experts, they were supreme experts of the Divine Domain, members of the

Storms of the Eight Directions. Even though Chen Changsheng was the future Pope, he was not worthy of being escorted by them. Their appearance and escort were primarily to display the intimidating strength of the Orthodoxy's conservative faction and the Imperial clan, a declaration to the world.

"The Empress has always had many enemies," Xu Yourong said as she gazed at the red flower in the plains.

Chen Changsheng thought, it seems to me that I should now be the enemy that the Empress most desires to eliminate.

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With two of the Eight Storms as escort, no army that the Great Zhou Imperial Court could move would be able to menace Chen Changsheng's life. Just as Xu Yourong had said, unless the Divine Empress personally stepped out, Chen Changsheng would be able to very peacefully return to the capital. Of course, he also had to ensure that the state of his body would not take a sudden downturn.

The current situation was very complicated, with many unsolved riddles contained within and also many dangers. In set intervals, Xu Yourong would use her Sacred Light technique on Chen Changsheng to ensure that the scent of blood within his body did not emerge. As a result, she consumed enormous amounts of spiritual sense, causing her face to increasingly pale.



Even so, she did not rest, calmly but vigilantly looking at the scenery along the road.

She arranged to keep Chen Changsheng close to herself on her imperial carriage, not permitting Chen Changsheng to take one step out of it. Whether it was eating, treating his wounds, resting, or even washing his face, it was all carried out on the carriage.

At the same time, she permitted no one else to enter the carriage. Anything related to Chen Changsheng, she personally handled. What to eat and what to drink, when to eat and when to drink, when he should sleep, when he should rise, and even whom he should meet. It must be known that even Tang Thirty-Six and Zhexiu could only come over when it was time to rest and chat with Chen Changsheng from several zhang outside the carriage.

At dusk on a certain day, Tang Thirty-Six came to the imperial carriage. Just like the days before, he anxiously waited for quite some time until the curtain was finally lifted. After he had barely talked with Chen Changsheng for a few moments, Xu Yourong came bearing a bowl of lotus seed porridge, indicating that the South Stream Temple disciples should bring down the curtain again.

Through the curtain, it was faintly possible to see Xu Yourong feeding Chen Changsheng the porridge. Tang Thirty-Six was furious and yelled within, "Are you raising a child! It's not like you're his mother!"

The expressions of the South Stream Temple disciples suddenly changed, followed by the clattering of swords from all around.

Tang Thirty-Six naturally did not have the courage to pit himself against South Stream Temple's sword array. He resentfully turned and headed back to the Orthodox Academy's carriage.

On the first few days, Zhexiu had still accompanied him every day to take a look at Chen Changsheng. Later on, after seeing that there were no problems with Chen Changsheng, he had little patience for interacting with those women of South Stream Temple, nor did he wish to see those scenes in the imperial carriage, so he no longer went. Now, after seeing Tang Thirty-Six so angrily returning and asking for the reason, he did not speak.

"Don't you think it's very strange?" Tang Thirty-Six asked.

Zhexiu said nothing. He naturally knew that there was something problematic about this matter, but as Chen Changsheng trusted in Xu Yourong so much, he could only keep watch on the side.

Many people felt that it was very strange, felt it problematic. After leaving Mount Han, many gazes had never left the imperial carriage.

They all had rather strange expressions as they thought, just what is going on here?

It had already been many days, and the Holy Maiden and Chen Changsheng had been in that carriage from morning to night. Just what were they doing?

At this point, many people had already vaguely guessed that they had been together since a long time ago, but they still found it impossible to accept that they were together at every moment.

It had nothing to do with factions or stance.

They could not accept that the spotlessly pure Holy Maiden was keeping a repulsive man by her side every day. It was truly somewhat unsightly.

The South Stream Temple disciples would occasionally be able to see her bringing Chen Changsheng tea or water, and a female disciple had even personally seen her wash Chen Changsheng's body.

Even if they were together, even if he was injured, did it warrant the Holy Maiden personally serving him?

Because of these matters, the mood hanging over the convoy was constantly rather weird and the South Stream Temple disciples felt rather oppressed.

Because Xu Yourong was their temple master, because she was the most respected and adored Holy Maiden that they treated as a god.

On the night of the same day, South Stream Temple disciple Ye Xiaolian carried a letter written by Chen Changsheng to the Orthodox Academy's carriage.